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## Self-examination

*Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing* (Acts 15:36).

After their first missionary journey together, the Apostle Paul suggested to Barnabas that they should re-visit the churches they had founded to see how they were getting on. He was anxious to know whether they were growing as Christians. So he said, 'Let us go back and visit our brethren and see how they are doing.' There is something we can learn from this – we need to examine ourselves to see how we are getting on in our relationship with God.

We live in an age of great *spiritual privileges*. The gospel has been preached almost throughout the whole world. The Bible is available in more languages than ever before. In many parts of the world the church has grown with great speed. But we must ask ourselves, 'Are we any better because of it?'

We live in an age of great *spiritual danger*. Never before have so many people throughout the world professed to be Christians. But are they all converted? Many like to attend large meetings, where exciting things are happening. But

looking for excitement is a different thing from *growing* as a Christian, and it is of great importance that we sometimes stop and ask ourselves where we really are spiritually.

Let me suggest to you ten questions to help you discover the truth about your spiritual condition. I ask these questions only for your good. If at first some of them seem to be rather harsh, remember that the person who tells you the most truth is in reality your best friend.

**1. Do you ever think about your spiritual condition at all?**

Sadly, there are many who never think at all about salvation. They never stop to think seriously about death and judgment, about eternity, about heaven and hell. They are too concerned with business, pleasure, their family, politics or money. They live as though they were never going to die and stand before the judgment of God. Such people are really bringing themselves down to the level of the animals, for they never think about the most important matters of life. Do *you* think about these things?

**2. Do you ever do anything about your salvation?**

There are many who sometimes think about Christianity, but who never get any further than thinking. Perhaps when they are in trouble, or someone has just died, or perhaps when they have met a real Christian or read a Christian book they think a good deal about it. But that is where they stop. They do not separate themselves from serving sin and the sinful world; they do not take up their cross and follow Christ. Remember – it is not enough just to think about God and about salvation. You must *do* something about it or you cannot be saved.

**3. Are you trying to satisfy your conscience with outward religion?**

Many make this mistake. Their Christianity consists entirely in outward duties. They attend all the meetings for worship. They are never missing from the Lord's Supper. They may hold very strongly to the particular teachings of their church, and argue with anyone who does not agree with them. Yet for all this, there is no devotion to Christ in their *hearts*. Their religion does not satisfy them, for they know nothing of inward joy and peace. Perhaps secretly in their hearts they know that something is wrong, but they don't know what. I appeal to you, then, to examine yourself. If you care about your salvation, do not rest content with mere outward observances. You must have much more than that to be saved.

**4. Have your sins been forgiven?**

You know in your heart that you are a sinner – that you have fallen short of God's standards in thought, in word and in deed. You know, therefore, that if on the last day your sins have not been forgiven, you must be condemned for ever. Now it is the glory of the Christian faith that it provides exactly the forgiveness that you need – complete, free, eternal forgiveness. This forgiveness has been bought for us by the Lord Jesus Christ, by His coming into the world to be our Saviour, and by His living, dying and rising again as our substitute. But although this forgiveness is perfectly free, it is not given to us automatically. You do not receive it simply by going to a Christian church, or even by becoming a member of one. It is something which each person must take hold of for himself by exercising personal *faith*. If you do not make it your own by faith, then as far as you are concerned Christ might as well not have died. Faith is simply a humble, sincere

trust in the Lord Jesus to save you. All who personally trust in Him are immediately accepted and forgiven, but without this trust there is no forgiveness at all.

So you see it is not enough simply to know the facts about the Lord Jesus Christ. You know that He is the Saviour of men, but is He *your* Saviour? Do you know that *your* sins are forgiven?

### **5. Have you experienced the reality of conversion to God?**

*'Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven'* (Matt. 18:3). *'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation'* (2 Cor. 5:17). By nature we are so weak, earthly-minded and sinful that without a complete change we cannot serve God in this life, and could not enjoy Him in heaven. Just as ducks when they are born naturally take to water, so when we are born we naturally take to sin. If we are to leave sin and learn to love God, a great change must take place in our lives. And if that change has taken place, it will be seen by its fruits. Do you have a sense of sin and of hatred for it? Do you have faith in Christ and love for Him? Do you love holiness, and long to be more holy? Do you find yourself growing in love for God's people and dislike of the ways of the world? These are the signs which always follow conversion to God. Where do *you* stand?

### **6. Do you know anything of practical Christian holiness?**

The Bible makes it clear that 'without holiness no one will see the Lord'. Holiness is the invariable result of true conversion. Now holiness is not absolute perfection – absolute freedom from sin. That exists only in heaven. Neither is holiness something which we obtain without a constant fight and struggle. But although holiness in this life is imperfect,

nevertheless it is real. Real holiness will make a man do his duty in his own home and at work and will affect the way he lives his daily life and copes with its problems. It will make him humble, kind, unselfish, considerate of others, loving and forgiving. It will not lead him away from the normal duties of daily life, but will enable him to live as a Christian wherever God has called him to be.

### **7. Do you know anything about enjoying the means of grace?**

By 'the means of grace' I mean five main things: reading the Bible, private prayer, meeting with other Christians for worship, taking the Lord's Supper and keeping the Lord's Day holy. These things God has graciously appointed either to bring us to faith in Christ or to help us make progress as Christians. Our spiritual condition will largely depend on the way in which we use them. Notice, I say the *way* we use them, for there is no automatic benefit in doing them. It is of great importance *how* we do them. So I must ask you, Do you find *delight* in reading God's Word? Do you *pour out your heart* to God in prayer? Is the Lord's Day a *delight* to you as you spend it in praise, prayer and Christian fellowship? Even if they had no other purpose, the 'means of grace' would still be useful as pointers to our true spiritual condition. Tell me what a man does in relation to these things and I will soon tell you whether he is on the road to heaven or to hell.

### **8. Do you ever try to do any good in the world?**

On earth, the Lord Jesus '*went about doing good*' (Acts 10:38). True Christians ever since have tried to follow His example. When the Lord Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) He ended by saying, '*Go and do likewise.*'

There are always opportunities for doing good. The only question is whether we really *want* to do it. Even those who have no money to give can do good to the sick and those with other problems, by being willing to spend time with them and by showing them sympathy and care. Read the story of the Good Samaritan. Do *you* know anything about this kind of love to others? Do you try to do good to others apart from your own friends, family and church? Are you living as a disciple of Him who '*went about doing good*' and commanded us to follow Him as our 'example'? (John 13:15)

### **9. Do you know anything of living the life of habitual fellowship with Christ?**

By 'fellowship' I mean the habit of 'abiding in Christ' which our Lord tells us is necessary if we are to bear fruit as Christians (John 15:4-8). We must understand clearly that having fellowship with Christ is much more than simply being a Christian. All who have repented and come to Christ are Christians, and belong to Him. But too many never get beyond this stage. Because of ignorance, laziness, fear of man, love of the world, or some besetting sin which has never been dealt with, they have only a little faith, a little hope, a little peace and a little holiness. They live all their lives bearing fruit only 'thirtyfold' (Matt. 13:8).

Fellowship with Christ is different. It is something experienced by those who strive constantly to grow in grace: in faith, knowledge, conformity to Christ's will in everything. It is experienced by those who 'press toward the goal' (Phil. 3:14). The great secret of fellowship is to be always living by faith in Christ, and continually drawing from Him all the resources that we need. The Apostle Paul could say, '*For to me, to live is Christ*' (Phil. 1:21), and '*It is no longer*

*I who live, but Christ lives in me* (Gal. 2:20). This kind of fellowship is perfectly consistent with a deep conviction of our own sins and corruption. It does not deliver us from the experience described in the seventh chapter of Romans. But it does enable us to look away from ourselves to the Lord Jesus, and to rejoice in Him.

### **10. Do you know anything of being ready for Christ's second coming?**

It is one of the great certainties of the Bible that Christ will come to this world again. He will come both to punish sinners and to bring the salvation of His people to perfection in His everlasting kingdom of righteousness. Are you ready for His coming? To be ready involves nothing more than being a real, consistent Christian. It does not involve abandoning your daily work so as to be ready for Him, but rather that you must do it as a Christian, with your heart always ready to leave everything when He appears. Again I ask you, are you ready?

### **Conclusion**

Let me finish with a few words of application.

1. Are you *asleep and thoughtless about spiritual realities*? Wake up! You are like someone sleeping in a boat drifting towards rocks which will destroy it. Wake up, and call upon God!
2. Are you *feeling self-condemned and afraid there is no hope for you*? Throw away your fears and listen to Christ. He says, '*Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*' (Matt. 11:28). '*The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out*' (John 6:37). These words are for you as well as for others. Bring all your sin and guilt, your

unbelief and doubt, your unfitness and weaknesses – bring them all to Christ. *‘This man receives sinners’* (Luke 15:2). He will receive you. Call on Him right now.

3. Do you *profess to be a believer in Christ, yet you have not much joy, peace and comfort?* Examine your heart today, and see whether the fault is not entirely your own. Probably you are making little or no effort, content with just a little faith, repentance and sanctification, and reluctant to be really zealous in the Christian life. If so, you will never be a happy Christian, unless you change your ways. Change today! Begin to be wholehearted in your Christianity. Strive to get nearer to Christ, to abide in Him, to hold on to Him, to sit at His feet like Mary, and to drink freely from the fountain of life. Only then will your joy be full.
4. Are you a believer, *but troubled with doubts and fears, because of your feebleness, weakness, and sense of sin?* Remember what the Bible says about Jesus: *‘A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench’* (Matt. 12:20). This text is for you. Even feeble faith is better than no faith. A small grain of life is better than no life. Perhaps you are expecting too much in this world, forgetting that you are not yet in heaven. You must expect little from yourself, but expect much from Christ. Look to Jesus more, and to yourself less.
5. Finally, are you *sometimes despondent* because of the trials you meet in life? Look up to Christ! He is altogether sympathetic, for He Himself has suffered. He is at God’s right hand. Pour out your heart to Him. He can do more than feel sympathy with you: He can help you. You must learn to draw near to Him. And remember – time is short.



## *Self-examination*

Soon it will be over and we shall be with the Lord. *For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while and he who is coming will come and will not tarry"* (Heb. 10:36-37).