

Self-Examination

by Ernest C. Reisinger

Ernest C. Reisinger's sermon emphasizes the necessity and importance of self-examination in the Christian faith for spiritual assurance and growth.

Duration: 58:06

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Corinthians 3:3, 1 Corinthians 6:1-10, 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 1 Corinthians 11:28, 2 Corinthians 13:5, 2 Peter 1:10

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by reflecting on the uniqueness and special qualities of the people he sees passing by. He then discusses the importance of approaching the Bible with three key questions: what does it say, what does it mean, and what is its purpose. The speaker emphasizes the need to examine oneself and make one's calling and election sure, stating that it is possible to know one's spiritual state. He provides directions for this duty, highlighting the dangers of complacency and the consequences of neglecting diligence in spiritual matters.

Transcript

One thing about Florida, our mosquitoes aren't as big as they are here. I never saw such a big mosquito as I did tonight in my room. They're even bigger than they are in Texas.

I think next year I'm going to talk to my dear friend Al Alderman and see if he won't give us a little repellent instead of so many cough drops. It is great to be here, not only for this privilege tonight to speak to you, but it's great for me to see so many faces of my dear Christian friends all over the land from Canada and other places. Today I stood on the porch and watched them stroll by for a while, and not every individual case, but in many of the faces there was something special, something peculiar, something different that I had to remember about them from the oldest to the least.

So in that respect, it's wonderful to be here tonight to seek to bring you this message, but more especially to just to be with you and be encouraged by the fellowship of the saints. Tonight, as I approach this subject that's been assigned to me, I want to share with you, first of all, before I give you a text, how I approach it, and maybe give you a little hint how you ought to approach the scriptures. I believe that everybody that approaches the Bible, whether it's for private devotions or to teach a Sunday school class or to preach, ought to ask at least three questions.

They ought to ask, what does it say? And the second question they ought to ask is, what does it mean? That's a little harder to come by sometimes, but they ought to ask a third question, what does it mean to me? What does it have to say to me? What does it say? It's simple. What does it mean, and what does it have to say to me or to us? At least I believe it would help us preachers to be more relevant sometimes. I remember I was in Fort Lauderdale some years ago, and there was a preacher preaching on a Sunday night.

It was one of those churches where they were straight as a gun barrel and just as empty. And a preacher was preaching on Sunday night, and his subject was the historicity of 2 Peter. I'm sure that the twelve people there didn't even know there was a problem, and he went to great lengths and pangs to answer the problem of the historicity of 2 Peter.

So I don't want to be guilty tonight of raising questions that's not in your mind. But as I approached this subject, I did sit down and I asked myself some questions. And this is not my outline, but I jotted them down, and I'm going to tell you some of the questions I asked myself about the subject.

What is self-examination? Why is it important? Why is it so important? What is the end or the purpose in view of this duty that's commanded in Scripture? What are the dangers and perils? And there are some. What are some of the objections that we meet to this doctrine? And if you've ever preached on it very long, you've met some objections. And then, how do I as a Christian go about this commanded duty? Now I'm going to try to answer some of those questions tonight as we approach our subject.

There are in the Bible, they're both implicit and explicit texts that deal with this duty. For instance, and I think this ought to show us how important the duty itself is, it's tied into the Lord's table. And there's not a Christian here tonight that does not place the Lord's table high on our list of doctrinal truths.

It's an ordinance. And in that context and connected with the Lord's table, which ought to teach us in itself, if there were no other verse in the Bible, it ought to teach us the importance of self-examination. And we have that text in 1 Corinthians 11, 28.

Then we have another explicit text in 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 5, that's my text for tonight and I'll read it in a few moments, where it tells us explicitly, examine yourself. We have a text in 2 Peter 1 10, give diligence to make your calling and election sure. So the duty is expressed in Scripture explicitly, but it's expressed many other ways.

The psalmist said in Psalm 77, 6, I commune with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search. In Psalm 4, verse 4, he says, Commune with your own heart upon your bed. And then the hymn that we sang tonight, or the psalm that we sang, was from 139.

And in that psalm we had, we sang it. You sang it with your lips. So you sang my subject.

Search me, O God, and know me, and see if there be any wicked way in me. Now, I've met with a lot of objections on the way, along the way, principally because of an itinerant type of ministry that I've been in in the past years. And I've met with a great deal of opposition and objection to this.

One of the objections, for instance, is, well, you're doubting God to question yourself. That's doubting God. Well, was Jesus teaching the disciples to doubt God when they, when there was a great declension among the disciples in John 6? And he said, will you also go away? The implication is, take a look at yourself.

Ask yourself, will you go away? Answer me, will you go away? He wasn't teaching them to doubt God about their security. Or at the Last Supper, when our Lord announced that one of them would betray me, it's interesting to note that they all said, Lord is it I? They weren't, they didn't have a dose of this antinomian assurance that's so prevalent today. Lord is it I? In fact, it was probably Judas who said it last.

Another objection you meet with is introspection. Well, it's all introspection. Tell us about joy and peace and comfort and forgiveness and justification.

Well, I believe that justification is the, the foundation doctrine in all the Bible. But we must ask, who wants to be justified? It's somebody that sees their need of justification. Who wants mercy in a real way? It's the man that felt his misery.

That's the man that wants mercy. And so these things are related. I remember once Mr. Martin and I were in a conference together at Quarryville, Pennsylvania, and the title of the theme for the conference, we had a theme in that conference, and the theme in that conference was Jesus is Lord.

And Mr. Martin bore down on that subject very much, like he can do. One of the other men on the program got very disturbed, because his wife started to question whether she was a Christian. And one of her friends started to question, have I ever been born again? Well, that'd be a good question for some of these wives tonight to ask themselves, and husbands too, and children too.

And I remember he was very disturbed about it, and I had a long talk with him, and I said, you know, he was preaching on self-examination. And so I said to him, how many times have you preached on this subject? I said, after all, this is the title of the conference, and the whole conference is geared to this end. This is not where a minister meets his congregation Sunday by Sunday and Sunday by Sunday.

So I kept saying, did you preach on it last year? No, not last year, the year before. I think I got up to about ten, and he hadn't preached on it in ten years, and I was trying to conclude that maybe he never did. I have learned since that the woman, the friend of that preacher's wife, really did become a Christian.

And I suppose the first time she ever started to question her relationship to God was at that conference. But the accusation was, well, there's no joy. Well, the Lord's principle is he kills before he makes alive.

And the Lord's principle is he wounds before he heals. And he doesn't heal slightly. When he heals, he heals well.

So that's other objections. And so who are the people that usually object to this doctrine of self-examination? I remember once I was preaching in a church in Philadelphia, where they had two Sunday morning services. The early service about 150 people, the next service about 500.

That would mean that there's about 750 people in that church, counting the ones that didn't come, maybe more, 650. And during the week, the minister of that church, the evangelical church, told me that he didn't believe, he said, I'm not God, but I don't believe that half of my people give Bible evidence of regeneration. But by the time the week was coming to an end, he was kind of, some of his people were getting a little disturbed, I believe.

And so I remembered what he had told me earlier in the week, because now he's kind of having little objections to this close preaching, I call it. At least I was making an effort to make it close and applicable. And he said, what do you want me to do, Ernie, every Sunday morning, get up, stand up there and tell

them they're not saved? I said, no, doctor.

I said, I wouldn't do that. He was a doctor. I said, I don't believe I'd do that.

I said, but I wouldn't get up there every Sunday morning and tell them they all are saved if I didn't believe they were. I said, I'd kind of go about it like this. I said, I, I said, I got a Bible and I said, I read it now and again.

And I said, I'd get up there and I learned from this Bible what a Christian is meant to be and to do. And I said, I'd get up there the best I know how and say from this Bible what a Christian is meant to be and to do. And then I'd say, are you a Christian? I'm not God.

So people do object, and especially people with shallow experience. Sometimes parents object, because if they would scrutinize, when you, when you start touching their children, because if you touch the children and then they'd examine, if they'd have to deal with the children, you'd find out that their own experience was not much better. I've found some preachers object to it, because they would be startled at the so-called convert that they're supposed to have had, if only those who were, who gave some Bible evidence of regeneration were counted.

And then, of course, I, there's some other objections, more, I think, more legitimate. There have been places where this doctrine has been misused and abused, like most of the great doctrines of the Bible. They've all been abused.

The doctrine of election, the doctrine that buttresses the gospel, has been abused and misused. But we don't throw it out because of that. I preached once in Louisiana.

You know, most places where I preach, everybody thinks they're all right, you know, and you have to kind of plow away. I got down to Louisiana, and it was quite different. I never heard of, I've never been in a place like that before or since.

But I think it came from, maybe this, this doctrine was a little bit abused. I remember I finished preaching, and I stepped down off the platform, and a dear old man and a woman sitting there in about the third row, taking in every word. And when I went down, they shook hands with me, and they say, pray for me, brother.

I'm awakened, but I'm not saved. I said, what'd you say? They said, I'm awakened, but I'm not saved. I said, how long you been awakened? They said, about 20 years.

And I kept on meeting some more people there. And finally, and this is, I'm not, you might think it's funny, but it wasn't funny then. And, and I found many people in that church that were awakened and never, never saved.

And I thought, boy, this old boy knows how to get them lost, but he doesn't know how to get them saved. And usually it's the opposite. Well, there's been places where it's abused.

And then of course, there's another group that objects. Everybody that has a bad title, they don't like to have a title check. The counterfeit doesn't like his, his money examined too much.

Now, I'm not going to try to balance it. I know these doctrines all need to be balanced. You know, they have to be balanced.

You've got to balance every doctrine. A fellow gave me a book some years ago. I guess he thought I needed it on bouncing doctrine.

Not bouncing like this, but bouncing like this. And when I got to about the page 20, he had bounced everything till it became applesauce and I quit reading the book. All these people trying to bounce doctrine.

Well, let the Bible take care of itself. You don't have to be apologizing for these doctrines if it's in the Bible. Preach it, preacher.

That's it. Now, there's some dangers. I'm aware of that.

There's some dangers. There are sensitive souls who we may call oversensitive. One of the things you learn in itinerant ministry is most times the people come to your concern when you're preaching, searching messages, or trying to, is the people who you wouldn't mind sailing with across the river that has no depth.

And some of those who are deeply concerned are the ones I say, well, brother, I wouldn't mind sailing with you, after they're finished. The ones that don't bother about it. So sensitive souls sometimes are oversensitive, and they're not knowing how to go about it.

Well, what is it? And then I'm going to get to the text in a minute. Well, I think I could sum it up like this. Let me give you a couple things that I believe self-examination is.

It's kind of like setting up your own court in your conscience. But it's a strange kind of a court, because you're the lawyer, and you're the client, and you're the judge. And you've got a holy book, and you cry out for the Holy Spirit.

But it's like setting up a court in your own conscience. It's like a spiritual inquisition. It's like heart anatomy.

Like a watchmaker takes the watch apart to see the defect, tries to find the trouble. So we kind of take our heart apart before God. It's seeking to know yourself, in particular your relationship to God.

It's trying to find out, if my beloved is mine, then I'm his. A lot of people here are married tonight, and you've got the certificate, and you live in the same house, and you've been married a long time. It would be kind of nice tonight if you could be sure that this is experience.

This is not what you have on paper, not the outside things that you go through as married people. There's many a man here tonight, many a woman, always concerned, is my beloved mine, and am I his. That's what self-examination is.

Know thyself. John Calvin begins the Institute by pointing out that there are two knowledges necessary for salvation, and you will never be saved without those two knowledges. One is a knowledge of self, and a knowledge of God.

And he goes on to say, he didn't know which gave birth to the other, but two knowledges are necessary for salvation. And no man is ever sorry, no man is ever sorry, that he tried to know his sincerity, and to be sure that he was right with God. There's no one ever been sorry.

And this duty properly managed will keep God from judging you. If we judge ourselves, 1 Corinthians 11 says, we won't be judged. And God will examine us, you can be sure of this.

We will be examined if we have the wedding garments. We have that wonderful parable in the scriptures, in Matthew 22 where it says, friends, how come a stout hither without a wedding garment? You see, if you don't ask the question, God will. Now I want to turn you to my text.

1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 5. One of those explicit places. And there are two things in answering some of those questions that I proposed to you at the beginning. There are two things in this text that are very plain and simple, and without resting the text at all.

It says this. Examine yourself, whether ye be in the faith. Prove your own self.

Know ye not your own self, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobate. And there's a clear duty expressed, and there's a clear purpose expressed for the duty. The duty is, it's a necessary duty, examine yourself whether you be in the faith, and that's the purpose.

And that is, prove yourself. Try as a goldsmith, test metal. Experimentally, what is in you? What does your experience prove? Do you have a name that you live and are dead, or are you, are you what you say? Prove your own self, how that Christ is in you.

Has Christ power, has the power of Christ wrought a transforming work in your soul? I have reason to believe by human observation, and I would either be ignorant of what the Bible says a Christian is, or I would be something less than honest if I didn't say, I believe our churches are filled with people who give no Bible evidence of regeneration. And I wouldn't suggest that you try to draw that line, which ones are on either side the line. Because you've got a crooked stick, and you can't draw straight lines with crooked sticks.

Now God can. He can draw straight lines with crooked sticks, but you can't. And so I'd suggest that.

You know, as you think of this passage coming to the end of Paul's Corinthian letters, it's no wonder he had suggested they ask this question. You know, I used to say, boy, if I could, when I was first a Christian, I used to say, if I could have just been in that early church, it'd have been great. You know, if I could have just been in that early church.

And then one day I stood up at a window, and I read 1 Corinthians straight through. And I found in the first chapter there were divisions and quarrels. That sounds natural.

They must have been Baptist. And then I found in the third chapter they were fighting over who was the best preacher. There were divisions among them.

Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. I find in the fifth chapter there was immorality of the worst sort, incest, and no repentance, apparently. I found in the sixth chapter there was lawsuits, one against the other, and no repentance.

I found in the seventh chapter that there was sexual problems between man and wife. Paul had to take time to explain that sex was for more than procreation. Some of you may not know that.

And then in the eighth chapter I found that there was a problem with Christian liberty, weak and strong Christians. In the ninth chapter I found that there was a problem about paying the preacher and Paul's apostleship. And then in the tenth chapter again, Christian liberty.

In the eleventh chapter there were problems with women and their hats and their hairdos and that kind of thing. That sounds like it, doesn't it? And then further on in that eleventh chapter there was disorder at the Lord's table. Above all things to have a quarrel about, the Lord's table.

Chapter twelve to fourteen is those chapters about spiritual gifts and the lack of love. Chapter fifteen there was doctrinal errors of the worst sort. A doctrinal error about the resurrection.

And then in the sixteenth chapter there was some problems about the collection. And when I finished I said, Lord, I think I'll just go back to Grace Baptist. Self-examination is necessary in regard to our comfort.

Necessary duty. Examine yourselves. It's obvious that it's a necessary duty.

It's necessary in respect to our comfort. I remember taking a man who was very depressed some years ago for two or three days, just take him away to try to help him. He was what I guess the old Puritans called very melancholy.

And I remember we had a motel side by side and I could go over there. And on more than one occasion during those couple days I went over, it was kind of cold in that motel as I remember, he was on his knees with a blanket around his back asking God to show him about his soul. Now there's a man that didn't understand examination.

I had every reason to believe and no reason to doubt for this moment that he was not a born-again Christian. All the externals in his manner of life and conduct and everything indicated that he was a Christian. You see some people don't have assurance that should have it.

Some people have assurance that shouldn't have it. But I remember this particular case. A man who seemingly was robbed of comfort because he didn't understand the principle of self-examination.

He knew that Christ was sent to redeem men. He knew that a ransom had been paid for him. He knew that hell was avoidable.

And he had awful fears of perdition. He knew that sin was pardonable. And he knew that heaven was attainable.

And he knew that justification was freely offered. And that were justified freely be grace. He knew all that.

But he knew that all this was upon the condition of faith. But he did not know whether or not he had that kind of faith that entitled him to the promises and the privilege that's promised, and the privileges of believers, of those who have true faith. I suggest tonight that self-examination is a necessary duty for many reasons.

But let me suggest three. First of all, it's very clear in the Bible that there are common graces as well as special saving grace. There's common grace that come to men as creatures from the hand of the Creator.

Just as there is an outward call of the gospel, today and this week and tonight, I hope, there'll be an outward call to every ear in this place. And as there is an outward call, so there is an inward call. As there is an outward profession, there's an inward transformation.

And it's necessary to examine because of this, the fact that there are common graces as well as saving graces. Another reason the duty is necessary is because it's also very clear in the Bible that there is

spurious faith. That is, faith that is not genuine.

That is, faith that is not saving. There's such a thing as head faith. That is, having certain knowledge, intellectual comprehension of certain historical facts about Jesus, and about the church, and about Bible truth.

Head knowledge, without the power of the gospel, without experiential acquaintance with the truth that's intellectually bleak. So there's head faith. That makes it necessary.

There's dead faith. James speaks of it. Faith without works is dead.

Now, when we say this, I'm going to be careful. You see, this is where that line gets fine. I suppose that every true preacher here tonight, and every true Christian, would let your head roll down the street in the dust.

For the great doctrine that was restored in the Reformation, the just shall live by faith. And when Luther found that in Romans 117, he wrote in his Bible, Thou shalt not be alone. I suppose you'd die for that, I hope.

God would give you grace we would. The just shall live by faith alone. Great truth.

But it's just as true to say that faith, which is alone, is not the faith that justifies. There's head faith. There's dead faith.

There's temporary faith. Luke 8, 13. They believe for a while.

How long is that? I don't know. There's vain faith, spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13, 1 to 4. Unless you have believed in vain. So it's a necessary duty, not only because there's common grace and saving grace, but because there's true faith and spurious faith.

And a third reason why self-examination is necessary, is because every man in this building tonight, and in this world, is either in the state of grace, or in the state of nature. There are two families here tonight. There's the family of the devil, and there's the family of God.

And you, my friend, are in one of those families. And in the world tonight, there are two families. It's necessary duty, because you're in the state of grace or nature.

There's a king in Adam's family. There was a hand in Noah's ark. There was a Ishmael in Abram's house.

And there was a Judas among the Savior's apostles. And at the last day, the whole world will be divided into sheep and goats. And it's necessary to inquire whose we are.

So therefore it's a necessary duty, because there's an outward call and an inward call. There's an outward profession and there's an inward possession. There's counterfeit faith.

There is a man who has a right hope on insufficient grounds. Job 8.13 says, the hope of the hypocrite shall perish. He has hope! He has faith! Insufficient grounds.

Well that's why it's necessary. And because it's so important, it requires diligence. It requires diligence.

This duty that I read to you tonight, examine yourself! Requires diligence. That's why Peter said, give diligence to make your calling and election sure. It's a difficult work.

You see, the roots of sin and lust lie deep in the secret corners. You know, our eye sees everything but itself. It's a difficult work.

It takes the spirit. And the duty requires diligence because men naturally, men naturally are very unwilling to this duty. A man with a questionable title, as I pointed out at the outset, doesn't like his title checked or searched.

Counterfeiters do not like their money tested. Have you ever asked yourself, do I have the distinguishing trait of Christian character? I'm not talking about something you did, something you said, way back there, that you think will take care of you down here. I'm talking about like tonight, maybe.

Men are raw to this duty. I wonder tonight how many people have never once considered self-examination. I ask the question again.

Have you ever asked yourself, am I in possession of those distinctive traits of Christian character? You see, men are unwilling to this duty because, you know what the principal reason is? Because of self-love. It's natural for men to love themselves. Though the evidence be on the other side, they give themselves the benefit of the doubt.

We're all prone to magnify our virtues and minimize our sins. David loved himself. He saw nothing wrong until Nathan said, thou art a man.

He wasn't practicing self-examination. Nathan had to come and say, thou art a man. He'd have picked up his Bible and read, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not murder, and examined himself in the light of that.

Maybe Nathan wouldn't have had to say, thou art a man. Proverbs 16 says, all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord wears the spirit. Another reason why men are unwilling to this duty is this.

Because of presumption and false security. You know, some of you walk like there was no heaven, and it concerns you not. And others walk presumptuously as if you were the heirs of heaven, and yet you have a bad time.

You know, I like one of what the old Puritan said about this subject. I guess he was bouncing it right properly, not improperly, when he said, the road to heaven is narrow. The road to heaven is narrow, my friend.

And let me tell you worse than that. It has two ditches, one on either side. On the one side of that road is the ditch of presumption.

And the other side of that road is the ditch of despair. But bless God, there are two hedgerows in front of those ditches. And in front of that ditch of despair is a hedgerow of God's promises.

And in front of that ditch of presumption is a hedgerow of God's precepts. And that's what I consider bouncing the truth. Two ditches.

You know, it's a terrible thing to be self-deceived. The self-deceived are in the most hazardous circumstances of any class of men. The man here tonight who is self-deceived, or the woman who is self-deceived, you are in the most perilous circumstances of anyone here.

There are some boys and girls here, and probably men and women, but a few people I know, who know that you're not a Christian, and you don't want to be a Christian. But there's somebody here in worse circumstances than you. And that's the self-deceived.

And Jesus said of them, and that's what he meant when he said, publicans and harlots will enter into the kingdom of heaven before some of you. Why is that? That harlot knows he's a harlot. And that publican knows he's a publican.

But that religious man that's not converted doesn't think he needs to be. That's why when a procession is made, Peter says, give diligence to make your calling and election sure. I was reading John Brown, one of my favorite commentators, on that passage.

He never finished his commentary on 2 Peter, and years ago my good friend Duke, I think, got me a copy of that. I believe that's where I got it. He sold me ten bucks, but it was all right.

It was worth it. And it's not quite finished, but he did get the first chapter. If you ever find any more of it, well, let me know.

I'll give you ten dollars for some more of it. But it's great. But John Brown, in commenting on that passage that I just quoted, give diligence, brethren, to make your calling and election sure.

This is what he said about it in that book. This is worth the whole book in itself. He said, If we would prove to the world and to ourselves that we are the called and elect of God, we must be and do what the called and elect of God are called to be and to do.

Is that too fast? Well, let me translate that for you a little better. If I would prove to the world that I'm a Christian, and to my own heart that I'm a Christian, I got to be and do what a Christian is. No one is at a greater disadvantage of obtaining mercy and true faith than those who have settled for a fault.

Diligence is necessary for another reason, because of the awful consequences. Because of man's unwillingness to it, to take diligence. Because we're naturally prone to think bitter of ourselves and deceive ourselves and delude others.

Well, why this duty? What's the purpose of it? Some of you here tonight, I don't doubt that this is a typical audience that I'm talking to some men and women that don't even think you can know you're saved. I don't want to overlook you tonight. Because one of the purposes of this duty, it would be ridiculous for God to tell us, to examine ourselves, if we be in the faith, if it were not possible for a man to know that he is in the faith.

That would be ridiculous. It would be ridiculous to have an exhortation from the great Apostle Peter, make your calling and election sure, if you can't be sure. And so let me say, first of all, one of the purposes is, your stake can be known.

Your stake can be known. Let me give you, quickly, a few directions to this duty. Because here are some of the dangers and perils.

And I hope you'll be, I hope you'll be patient and take a mental note of some of these directions. And I trust they'll be helpful. And the first one is this.

If you're to examine yourself when you be in the faith, the first direction I give is this. You must know the marks. You must know the distinguishing marks, the peculiar marks, of a true Christian.

The second direction I give you is this. You've got to know what a Christian is. You know, some people think a Christian is somebody that's perfect.

And they run around with these little glasses, like these women have these glasses on a pole, you know, I don't know what you call that. I'm going to make some buttons and I'm going to sell them next year at the conference, Bill. You know what I'm going to put on them? I'm going to make one for myself first.

I'm going to put on here, don't worry brother, God's not finished yet. That's all. He's not finished yet.

He's still working on them. And he knocks some big chunks off at a time sometimes, too. And it hurts.

Way down. Like you can't tell it. It's painful.

He's not finished yet. Second direction is this. Make the word of God the rule of your title search.

Not the standards of some men. Not the standards of some church. Not how long you wear your dresses, or how short you cut your hair, or whether you polish your fingernails, or pluck your eyebrows.

That's not the rule. The standard must be the word of God. And I want to tell you something.

It'll be honest with you. Preachers aren't always honest with you. And you see, to avoid morbid introspection, this one rule alone will avoid morbid introspection.

Because when you go down in that deep cellar of your soul and conscience, you take the candle of the word of God. And that will hinder morbid introspection. And when you take that candle in there, you'll find that a Christian is somebody that sins.

So that every little weed in your garden you'll know is not condemning you to perdition. The best gardens have a few weeds in them. You'll read a passage like, He that sayeth he hath no sin is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Take the word of God. And then thirdly, don't trust your heart's first, the first dictates of your conscience. He that trusteth his own heart says the Proverbs is a fool.

Proverbs 28 26. Fourthly, pray for the assistance of the Spirit. Why? Because you need a mirror.

That's the word of God. And you need a light to see the mirror. You could have a wonderful mirror in a dark room.

It wouldn't do you much good. You need a light. And the mirror is the word of God.

And the light is the Spirit of God. And that will kill all introspection, morbid introspection. Because you go down in that cellar with a light, and you go down with a mirror.

A true mirror, and a perfect light. Another direction to self-examination that I suggest is this, and this is very important. When you do find the grace and the marks of Christian character, you must remember not to rest on the mark for your justification.

That'll lead to legalism and Phariseism, and it'll do despot to that great doctrine of justification. We do not rest on our mark or our evidence for our justification. We may draw some comfort and assurance from the evidence of our justification, but we must not have the inclination of founding our justification before God on the evidences of our justification.

Oh, I hope you've got that. Grace and marks are signs, not causes, of our justification. Oh, do not miss this point tonight, because this is where this whole doctrine many times gets thrown out, because men abuse this point, misuse this point, do not understand this point.

Christ's righteousness only is our wedding garment. Liberty is a sign of the convict's pardon, but it was a judge who gave him the pardon. The prisoner's freedom is evidence that he's been made free, but the court says, turn the prisoner loose.

Don't miss that. Be sure, therefore, to distinguish between the cause of justification and the mark by which it's made known to us. Self-examination is not only to prove that we're not Christians.

Most of the time, when you talk about self-examination, people think, this is what the preacher's going to try to do to prove that people are not Christians. That's not it at all. It's also to show true Christians that they are true Christians, and that they may draw comfort and proper, biblical assurance from the examination.

The sixth and last direction that I offer in properly managing this clear duty is this. Don't come to conclusions about your relationship to Christ, when it's wintertime in your soul. Every Christian here tonight knows of times when the heavens were black.

Every Christian here, it's not unusual for true Christians to come to me and say, oh, I'm not praying anymore. I'm not reading my Bible like a... It's not unusual for young people to go off to school and be cropped up for a while and... Let me say it again. Don't come to conclusions about your relationship to Christ, when it's wintertime in your soul.

If I went out in Bill Winger's garden in January, I wouldn't expect to find any beans, because it's wintertime. You know, that's just why this doctrine that I'm talking about tonight is so inseparably joined to the Lord's table. One of the purposes of the Lord's table is to restore or make forgiveness fresh.

Fresh assurance. To make forgiveness fresh. But if you have no fresh view of sin, by examining yourself, the Lord's table won't be fresh.

That which you're meant to remember won't be fresh. It'll become perfunctory. It'll become mechanical and cold.

But if, with proper examination, you come to the Lord's table, forgiveness will be fresh, and assurance will be fresh. I say that last point for those of you who've come to this conference out of the battlefield. Some of us come to these conferences out of the battlefield.

And you get the scars of the battle, and you get cold. Some of you young people are coming from schools where there's no Christian friends much. Some of you are coming from areas where there's no strong Christian church, and you don't have a godly pastor.

Some of you are coming out from a battlefield. You're down and you're defeated. Well, don't come to conclusions about your relationship to Christ when it's wintertime in your soul.

Christ is still for those who've grown under the burden of sin. Christ is still, my dear friends, Christ is still the great provision for sin-fixers. Christ is still the city of refuge for the male faction.

Christ is still the lifter-up of those who've been stung by the serpent. That's why I emphasize that last rule. Let me spend just a few minutes on results, and then a little plea to those of you who don't know Christ, that I'm sinning.

What is the result of proper, if it's managed properly, self-examination? Well, I've already said it. The result is this. It keeps faith in Christ vigorous.

It keeps repentance toward God fresh and vigorous. And Christian, if you don't know it yet, you need fresh repentance, and you need fresh forgiveness, and you need a fresh glimpse of Christ daily. The main result is you keep faith in Christ and repentance toward God fresh and vigorous.

Charles Hodge said this, and I want you to get this, because you see this doctrine is closely related to assurance. Charles Hodge said this, and I quote, true assurance leads to candid self-examination and a desire to be searched and corrected by Almighty God. True assurance leads to candid self-examination and a desire to be corrected by Almighty God.

And in that same place, he said, false assurance leads to a disposition to be satisfied with appearance and avoid accurate investigation. There can be no more dreadful sin. Well, there could be no more, I should say, no more dreadful sign of no saving grace than not to reflect upon this necessary duty.

The text says, examine yourselves whether you be in the faith. If you don't, I believe I could draw from the text that you're reprobate. That is unsound, insincere, not in the faith of Christianity.

Well, there's one group of people I don't want to confuse anybody, but there's one group of people I'm sure I don't want to confuse, and that's those of you who've never made a profession of Christ. And since I've been talking about a Christian duty, I don't want to confuse you. And therefore I want to say again, Christ is our righteousness.

When I'm talking about examining these things, all my sinner friends, the unconverted man, you can't go to heaven on your wife's religion. Some of you unconverted wives, you can't go to heaven just because your husband's a preacher. Some of you unconverted young people, you can't go to heaven just because you've got godly parents.

That's a great privilege. And therefore, I want you to see Christ as our righteousness. And I felt one of the best ways I can do that is close with a poem that sets Christ out.

It's a poem by Robert Mary McShane. And it sets Christ out. And my real purpose of this is to unconfuse anybody that may be confused on this point.

I'm going to have to make you a Hebrew scholar now. You know, the only Greek I know makes submarine sandwiches, and the only Hebrews I know are lawyers. But I learned this one word.

It's Jehovah Sidkenu. And I'll spell it for you. T-S-I-D-K-E-N-U.

Now the reason I'm telling you this word is because what I have to say when I give you this poem won't make any sense unless you can translate this word. And when I say Sidkenu, you say the Lord is our righteousness. And then you'll understand the poem, and you'll understand why I want to use it to dispel any darkness of those of you who are not Christians.

McShane wrote, I once was a stranger to grace and to God. I knew not my danger and felt not my load, though friends spake in rapture of Christ on the tree. Jehovah Sidkenu was nothing to me.

I offshred with pleasure to soothe or engage Isaiah's wild manger or John's simple page. But even when they pictured the blood-sprinkled tree, Jehovah Sidkenu was nothing to me. Like tears from the daughters of Zion that roll, I wept when the waters went over his soul with crucifixion, yet thought not that my sin had nailed to the tree.

Jehovah Sidkenu was nothing to me. When free grace awoke me by light from on high, then legal fear shook me, I trembled to die. No refuge, no safety in self could I seize.

Jehovah Sidkenu, my Savior, must be. My terrors all vanished before that sweet name. My guilty fears vanished with boldness I came.

To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free, Jehovah Sidkenu is all things to me. Jehovah Sidkenu, my treasure and boast. Jehovah Sidkenu, I ne'er can be lost.

In thee shall I conquer by stride or by field. My cable, my anchor, my breastplate, my shield. Even treading the valley, the shadow of death, this watchword shall rally my faltering breath.

For when from life's fever my God set me free, Jehovah Sidkenu, my death song.

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