

EXAMINE YOURSELVES

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
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Let's Begin

Henry Martyn was a great, effective missionary to India and Persia. Most of what we know of his ministry comes from his personal journal. On one occasion, he wrote, "My object in making this journal is to accustom myself to self-examination, and to give my experience a visible form so as to improve my soul in holiness." Reflecting on our beliefs and behaviors has a way of forging our character, or, in Martyn's words, "improving our soul in holiness."

Thus, Martyn believed in self-examination. So did the Apostle Paul. We find this truth clearly demonstrated in 2 Corinthians 13 as Paul sums up his epistle.

As we begin our study of this chapter, let's ask the following questions in the outline below:

- I. Is There Ethical Purity in My Life? (vv. 1-4)**
- II. Is There Extraordinary Reality in My Life? (vv. 5-8)**
- III. Is There Explicit Maturity in My Life? (vv. 9-13)**

I. Is There Ethical Purity in My Life? (vv. 1-4)

It was Socrates who said, "the unexamined life is not worth living." Paul was much clearer and far more precise. He argued for *moral* purity, *moral* self-examination in the believer's life. He wrote, "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you" (vv. 3-4).

In these words, Paul pulls no punches in closing his letter. He comes on strong. The Corinthians had used a microscope on him. Up until now, the Apostle to the Gentiles had been running defense, a tactic within which he took no vain-glory. Now he runs an offensive maneuver. He confesses he will not "spare" (v. 2) so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established (v. 1). It is time for the Corinthians to check up on their own life.

With such a background in mind, the first question may now be asked: Is there ethical purity in my life? The answer contains two necessary parts.

The first part of the answer describes the *problem of pollution*. Paul had earlier hinted at pollution, "For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and *that* I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest *there be* debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: *And* lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and *that* I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed" (12:20-21).

The list Paul compiles throws a thick blanket of embarrassment over the Corinthian church. These are the vices of pagans without Christ, not the people of God! Even so, a self-examination reveals the church's failures all too graphically.

Paul lists *sins of disposition* (v. 20). Included by the Apostle are "debates" which refer to all types of quarrels and disputes, as well as "envyings"

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Reflection Connection

It has been said that there are two types of sin: sins of commission and sins of omission. What do you think is meant by that statement? Can you distinguish between the two types by giving illustrations of each?

which reduces to godless jealousy. In addition, there were “backbitings” and “whisperings” which took place. The Greek term translated “whisperings” carries with it the idea of secret talk. As opposed to speaking openly and publicly, these people, the Apostle suggests, carry on a whispering campaign to destroy another person. To make it worse, all these sins of disposition were being carried out by Christians about Christians!

Furthermore, Paul lists *sins of the flesh* (v. 21). The three particular sins Paul mentions have to do with lustful living (uncleanness), illicit sex (fornication), and shameless animal lust (lasciviousness). As animals have no shame for the self-gratification of physical desires they crave, so those who commit the sins of the flesh.

While the first list seems to be inwardly-oriented and the second list having more of an outward orientation, sometimes sins of disposition very well are the result of sins of the flesh. In other words, the root of *outward* behavior stems from the *inner* heart. One meditates on evil before one performs the evil. Our Lord had this in mind when He said, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man” (Matt. 15:19-20).

Again, we ask, is there moral purity? While the first part of the answer describes the *problem of pollution*, the second part describes the *promise of solution* (v. 4). How does the Christian conquer sin in his or her life? There is one and only one answer: *the cross*.

As we consider the cross, from the human standpoint the cross is a place of weakness. However, the reality is, the cross is the place of power. Sin was put to death at the cross (cp. Rom. 6:6). Consequently, we live the resurrection life by the power of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:11). Our life has a fountain of cleansing flowing through it (1 John 1:7). If a Christian lives in sin, it is because he or she has not appropriated the power of Christ made available at the cross.

II. Is There Extraordinary Reality in My Life? (vv. 5-8)

The next question to ask pertains to whether there is reality in your life. Ask yourself if the measure of your life is the real world. Are you truly in the faith? Are you authentically saved? Indeed there exist those who are counterfeit believers. Are you one of them? How do you know? There is only one way to be sure: you must examine yourself by the Word of God. The Bible can never lose its rightful place as our supreme authority for faith and practice.

The Apostle John lends much credence to Paul’s focus here. His first little letter offers to Christians a series of tests which reveal whether our faith is real or not.

The root of outward behavior stems from the inner heart.



Reflection Connection

The presence of true and false professors in the church challenges us to be very discerning. On the other hand, it is very easy to become judgmental and perhaps wrongly accuse people of false belief. How do we remain balanced?

The first test is our relationship to Scripture. John writes, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.” (1 Jn. 2:3-5). The emphasis on “keep” is key. “Keep” means “to carefully guard” as one would a found treasure. In short, it is the attitude of obedience, the mark of being disciples of Jesus.

No idea of moral perfection is in the Apostle’s mind as he makes clear earlier in his letter (1 John 1:7, 9). However, there is the idea of a fundamental desire to obey the Word of God. Remember: *being obedient does not render one saved.* Only the cross of Jesus Christ and our faith in Him makes a person saved. Being obedient means being a disciple of Jesus. We are obedient because we are disciples not in order to become disciples.

The second test is our relationship to sin. John explicitly deals with our relationship with sin (3:6-7). Again, John does not imply a person who is saved never sins. When he says the Christian who abides in Christ “sinneth not” (v. 6), indicative of the verb tense is the implication of continued practice. In other words, the believer who abides does not continually practice sin; he or she does not live in known sin. John is clearly speaking about character traits, character habits.

The third test is our relationship to saints. He further writes, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (3:14). Do you love God’s people? Have you a fundamental love for God’s church? Trendy views today speak of “loving Jesus” but “hating church” or “rescuing Jesus from the church.” While these clichés may be clever, they are not found in the Word of God. Jesus is never seen as divided from His church. The church is God’s church, no institution will ever take its place.

The fourth test is our relationship to the Savior. John is clear, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (4:7). Jesus is not a “dude” or a “buddy.” He is God in human flesh, God with skin on. The love we have for Him should reflect our reverence of Him, our honor to Him, and the deserved glory for Him. It is never hard to love a Savior like Jesus!

III. Is There Explicit Maturity in My Life? (vv. 9-13)

Paul’s final concern revolves around whether the Corinthians had matured in the faith. Recall in Paul’s first letter, he expressed his uninhibited fear that the church at Corinth lacked a healthy spiritual level of Christian maturity. He wrote, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto

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carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able *to bear it*, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal... and walk as men” (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

Therefore, before Paul ends his correspondence, he is careful to revisit his first concerns about them and their lack of Christian maturity. He now writes, “For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, *even* your perfection... .Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (vv. 9, 11). Just because sin is found in the believer’s life is no proof the person is unsaved. Again, we insist Christians are not perfect—morally or spiritually—and will not be until Jesus Christ returns. The fundamental problem Christians face is maturity.

In addition, as we observed above, just as there is a standard for measuring reality in the believer’s life, it is also possible to measure maturity in a believer’s life. Just how does a disciple of Jesus Christ gauge his or her maturity?

First, the believer’s spiritual maturity is gauged by *spiritual nourishment*. The Apostle Peter could not be clearer, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). Getting into the Word of God daily will produce healthy growth leading to maturity in the believer’s life. In fact, without the daily spiritual sustenance the Word of God affords, believers will naturally dry up.

Second, the believer’s spiritual maturity is gauged by *spiritual exercise*. While trends in our culture seem always fanatical toward the latest new gimmick to promote physical exercise, the truth remains: bodily exercise benefits our health. It is no less true for our spiritual development. And, the greatest exercise Christians can do is tell somebody about Jesus.

Third, the believer’s spiritual maturity is gauged by *spiritual communication*. No healthy marriage ever survived a communication void. No business possesses a healthy customer base which refuses to practice positive communication with the customer base. Similarly, Christians have prayer by which we spiritually connect with our God. Paul wrote elsewhere to pray, “always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”, which can only lead to perseverance and growth (Eph. 6:18).

Reflection Connection

Have you considered whether or not you are growing in maturity toward Christ? How can you tell? What are some ways the church can tell if it is growing in maturity toward Christ?

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to “examine” themselves in the faith (v. 5). The Greek term translated “examine” is the word *peirazo*, which basically means to “make proof of,” “to attempt.” In secular Greek, it was used in the sense of “striving” or “making effort,” often times in a negative way. We see this sense as well in the New Testament, for *peirazo* is frequently translated by the English term “tempted” (Matt. 4:1) or “is tempted” (James 1:13). Paul is using the term as an exhortation to the Corinthians to learn the true nature of their character and faith.

Wrap Up

Peter said it like this, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18a). Pressing on to maturity in Christ, in the end, is a command we must obey, not an option way may consider. Maturity stands at the threshold of Christian effectiveness and global evangelism. An immature Christian is a weak Christian and cannot minister Christ to a hurting world. Nor can a church. We must move on to maturity in Christ.

