

A Spiritual Checkup



BE Still.

THOUGHTS AND READINGS FOR MEDITATION

What is wrong with the church must be the sum total of what is wrong with each individual Christian.

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t's always a good idea to get a physical check-up at least a couple of times a year. These physical check-ups cost a little time and a little more inconvenience. But if the beginnings of a dangerous illness are discovered, the cost is well worth it.

Now, something is very wrong with the world, and a Christian is supposed to have the answer to the moral plague sweeping the nations. But something is very wrong with the average Christian church. There is supposed to be love, but there is envy, strife and division. There is supposed to be holiness, but there is instead often downright ungodliness. There is supposed to be power, but there is largely only weakness and spiritual anaemia. We are supposed to have revival, but on the whole we have still not seen any great awakening.

"My brethren, these things ought not to be."

What is wrong with the church must be the sum total of what is wrong with each individual Christian.

If people can have medical check-ups for their bodies, why

shouldn't there be spiritual checkups to examine the state of our souls?

If a physician can prescribe treatments for bodily ailments, does not the Master Physician have one for the diseased soul? Of course, He does. But before a cure can be accepted and applied, there must be diagnosis and verdict. To do this, some sort of spiritual check-up is needed for us all.

One caution: Like any check-up, this is going to cost you time and inconvenience. However, unlike the physical check-up it may also hurt somewhat. Of course, a sore spot shows infection present. When you go through this process, remember it is designed to expose, and that exposure might hurt! Be assured however, that a little pain now may save an awful lot of trouble later. If it is any consolation before you begin, this check-up is absolutely free.

It will only cost you, of course, on diagnosis, your sin. Of all things, you can afford to lose that, can't you? Nobody in their right mind wants to keep a killer cancer.

Ready? To take this spiritual check-up you will need only pencil,

"Lift our eyes heavenward. Earthward is bad enough, but inward is dreadful. Lift us heavenward to where Jesus sitteth on the right hand of God."

"WHITHER THE FORERUNNER IS FOR US ENTERED." HEB. 6:20

paper, some time—and complete honesty. Deep breath... Take a seat.

CASE HISTORY

For the next hour or so, let the Holy Spirit turn His searchlight on your spiritual life. Let Him probe, X-ray and test your soul! And let Him start by opening the closets of your memory.

Memory is highly efficient at remembering wrong. Although it easily forgets merely unpleasant or worthless things, it rarely forgets unrighted sin. Much mental illness today can be traced to guilt never wiped from the mind by the twin tools of confession and restoration—and receiving forgiveness. Shock, drugs and other medical and psychiatric treatment may try to take guilt memories from the mind, but God's method is the only fully effective one: FACE each wrong with its full load of guilt, admit it to God and others who are involved AS wrong, then ask and receive healing forgiveness. (Ps 32:1-5; 1 Jn. 1:5-9)

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Use the following three lists as check-up charts to examine your life before the Lord. Take each one slowly and carefully and take the time to look up the Bible references. Check each area that is a 'sore spot' and on your own paper write out what you will have to do to get it right. Confess them to the Lord one by one as He shows them to you. When you have finished, RE-READ your list again, and add any others that come to mind. Don't give in to the temptation to pass quickly over any area that hurts. Be courageous and face your sin. This first part will be painful. Let God furrow your heart and break up all the hardness that has formed from unconfessed sin. If the tears start, let them. "Godly sorrow works repentance" and tears may soften your heart so God can work with it. (2 Cor. 6:1-10; Ps. 38:18; 34:6, 18; 51:17; Eccles. 7:3; Ps. 147:3; Ezek. 34:16; Luke 4:18)

MEMORY TEST

1. Stealing—Can you remember taking money or property that was not yours? Did you steal from neighbours, relatives, shops or stores, school or home? (Ex. 20:15; Eph. 4:28)
2. Cheating—Did you get anything from anyone unfairly? Does someone know or suspect that you cheated to pass an important test? Did you rob someone of their fair share of praise or pay for a job? (Jas. 5:1-4; Mal. 3:5; Deut. 24:14-15; Jer. 22:13; Job 31:13)
3. Lying—"Any designed form of deception for selfish reasons". If you design to make an impression contrary to the naked truth, you have lied. Have

you been deceitful? (Rev. 21:8)

4. Slander—Speaking evil of someone. You do not have to lie to slander. Have you talked about someone behind their back in a way you would not be willing to before their face? Malicious gossip—telling the truth with intent to hurt or injure is slander. Are you guilty of backbiting or criticism? (Matt. 7:1-5; 1 Cor. 5:12; Col. 3:8; Matt. 5:21-24)
5. Immorality—Are you guilty of stirring up desires that you could not righteously feed? In outings with the opposite sex have you failed to keep your body and mind clean and pure, and bartered your integrity for pleasure? (Matt. 5:28; Job 31:1; 2 Pet. 2:14; 1 Cor. 6:18)
6. Censoriousness—Have you spoken about others without love? Did you judge, think or say the worst thing about a person in a situation you knew? (Jn. 7:24; 1 Cor. 4:1-7; Gal. 6:1)

ACTION TEST

1. Envy—Behind talk of other's failures and faults usually lurks envy. Did you gossip and boast to exalt yourself at another's expense? Does it hurt to hear certain people praised? If you have nursed this spirit of Hell, repent DEEPLY. (Job 5:2; Prov. 14:30; 27:4; Gal 5:25)
2. Pride—Pretending in thought or life to be more or less than you really ARE. Do you pay more attention to your looks than your soul? Is there a trouble-stirring spirit in your life? These are the signs of pride. (Prov. 16:5; 12, 18: 21:4; 29:23; Tit. 3:9; 1 Cor. 1:26-31; 1 Pt. 5:1)
3. Ingratitude—How many times have others gone out of their way for you, perhaps really sacrificed to help you—and you took this all for granted? (2 Tim. 3:2; Mal. 3:8-11)
4. Anger—Have you been bad-tempered? Did you shrug off self-control and lose patience or gentleness with someone? (Prov. 14:29; 15:8; 21:9; 22:24; Eccl. 7:9; Eph. 4:26; Col. 3:8)
5. Cursing—Have you used gutter language? Swearing has no place in the life of a child of God. Never use exclamations beginning with "G", "J", or "C"; they are usually substitutes for curses against God. Have you failed to guard your speech? (Deut. 5:11; Matt. 5:33-37)
6. Levity—"Needless frivolity, silly talk, talking and acting like a moron". Jest that tend to undermine the sacred and precious standards of life; "Bible" jokes that make light of the Holy Word of God; unprofitable, empty and often stupid foolishness achieves nothing but a dangerous devaluation of the Christian's word. Real humour is a gift of God,

and will always edify or prepare the way for the Holy Spirit; foolish levity is sin. (Ecc. 5:3; Prov. 24:19; Eph. 5:4)

INNER INSPECTION

1. Hardness—Did you fight back, murmur or return evil for evil? Was your response to trial un-Christlike when you were wronged or hurt by someone? (Phil 2:14; 1 Cor. 10:10)
2. Habits—Have you continually over-indulged natural appetites until they have grown far beyond normal? Are you a slave to food, drink or stimulants? (Phil. 3:19; Prov. 23:21; 1 Cor. 6:19)
3. Half-heartedness—Can you remember times when you deliberately shirked your full share of responsibility? Did you skip times of secret or public prayer to please yourself when you should have been meeting with God? Have you been flippant and light with Him? (Prov. 19:15; 21:5; 24:11-12; Matt 25:1-13; 25:14-30; 1 Thess. 5:6; Jas. 4:13-17)
4. Hindrance—Have you destroyed another's confidence in you by needlessly taking up their time? Have you prevented them from doing God's work for yourself? (Eph. 5:16)
5. Hypocrisy—Did the life you lived before some people make all you said of Christ and His gospel a lie? Have you said one thing and done another? Were others turned from God by your life that declared to them your hypocrisy? (Matt. 6:5-6; 7:3-5; 23:28; Rev. 3:15-16)
6. Broken Vows—Is there a vow you made to God that you have not kept? Did you promise Him something that you have since forgotten or gone back upon? If it was unwise, you had better ask forgiveness and release; He expects you to KEEP voluntary vows! (Eccl. 5:1-6)

SURGERY NEEDED?

If the Holy Spirit shows us sin, we must go back to the place where the Lord first met us. It is the cross again. We see the Lord Jesus once crucified—for that sin—bearing our penalty.

A line of blood trickles down from its splintered base. The sight should shock and grieve us; we see the awfulness of God's judgment. This is not the law, representing God armed with holy wrath and determined to punish the sinner without hope or help, but LOVE demonstrated in the infinite cost and sacrifice God is willing to go to in order to save us from sin. It is the most terribly beautiful picture of the Gospel, showing God's hatred for sin and heartbreak over mankind's selfishness. If

we continue in sin, well might “heaven put on the robes of mourning and Hell hold a jubilee.” All God’s care and love—and DARE we still sin?

Walk out into the light of reality. Drop your self-deceit and face this sin for what it really is. Turn from it, from your heart. Take sides with God against it. Purpose in your heart NEVER to return to that sin again.

“Oh God, You know my foolishness, and my sin is not hid from You... for Your Name’s sake, pardon my iniquity, for it is great... If you, Lord, would mark iniquities, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.” (Ps. 69:5; 25:11; 130:3-4)

Will you do this now? Will you go to your gracious and loving Father as a little child and humbly ask His forgiveness?

“If we confess our sins, He is FAITHFUL and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 Jn. 1:9) “The LORD is merciful and gracious... He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities; For as the heaven is above the earth, so great is His mercy towards them that fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.” (Ps. 103:12)

CONFESSION

Confession is humbling yourself and admitting your wrong. Restitution is the willingness to pay back or restore wherever possible. If you are now forgiven before the Lord, are you ready to ask Him for the courage to confess and restore to others you have wronged? Your conscience must be clean before both God AND man if you want to know true freedom. You cannot stand for God with a dirty past in others’ eyes; memories of failure in their eyes will drive you deeper into bondage each time you remember them; when you have not asked their forgiveness, your guilt will kill your faith and rob you of direction and purpose. You will not, of course, have to confess every sin to everyone; just the sins committed against the ones you know you have wronged.

The RULE: The circle of CONFESSION should only go as far as the circle of COMMITTAL. Those sins against God alone you have left with His loving forgetfulness. (Ps. 103:8-13; Is. 43:25; Jer. 31:34) Those against God and man must be put right with BOTH God and the person(s) wronged.

Restitution should only go as far as the

person can humanly repay. You will NEVER be able to undo all your wrong, but God expects you to do all in your power to restore that which you have taken from others; no more and certainly no less. God asks of you the WILLINGNESS, if need be, to go to a hundred people to restore a relationship. True, total repentance is to do that which is right up to the full limit of our ability. It concerns only that which is KNOWN and RECOGNISED to be sin by the repentant one. Often those who see your sincerity may make exceptions to any claims they have to restitution, but you will have to trust your case to the hands of God Who does all things well.

GETTING RIGHT WITH OTHERS

NAME the BASIC SIN! You can never really right the RESULTS of your sin; no-one can really forgive you for these. However you must always right the sin by naming it clearly and asking forgiveness for it. Confess the sin that caused your words or actions; God will show you what it is. What was your REAL wrong? Write it down so you can see it. Are you sure that was what it was?

Make sure the WAY you ask is right. Such half-hearted “confessions” as these show false or incomplete repentance and are usually worse than useless:

1. “I’m sorry, but it wasn’t all my fault!”
2. Forgive me IF I have wronged you...”
3. “I was wrong, but SO WERE YOU!”
4. “Alright, I’m sorry” or just “I apologise...”

Full blame must be taken; the sin must be NAMED; pride must be crucified.

1. Do you know the basic sin you must get right?
2. Have you thought through what you are to say?
3. Is the time convenient for the other person?
4. Can you be alone when you see this person?

- Do you have a truly repentant attitude? If you have trouble feeling sorry, think of all the hurt and loss your sin has caused. What did your sin cost Christ? (read Lk.22:39-44; Jn. 15:8-14). The Holy Spirit convicts by recalling from your memory in DETAIL all the results of your wrong. Go over your sin in detail, never in general. As you think deeply about the effect of your sin, you can

have a repentance that matches your guilt.

- Are they in a good mood to forgive? If they get angry when you arrive, wait quietly in a repentant manner until their temper is under control. Then acknowledge your sin and ask forgiveness. Pray before you go for help. (Prov. 22:24; Matt. 5:43-48) Don’t use words taking the blame off yourself; don’t involve others who may have also sinned; don’t try to witness as well, unless specifically asked why you are getting this thing right; don’t underestimate your guilt or their hurt and don’t wait too long to go and get it right!

The elements of these three sentences MUST be in any truly effective confession:

1. God has convicted me of something I did (have been doing) against you...”
2. “I’ve been wrong in...” (NAME the basic sin: being envious, proud, stubborn etc.)
3. “I know I’ve wronged you in this, and I want to ask you: will you forgive me?”

EXCUSES from pride: When it comes to getting right with others, our minds supply many “reasons” why we need not do what we know we MUST do. Be BRUTALLY HONEST with yourself. Deal with each AS AN EXCUSE. Determine to do what is right. It’s your life!

When you have gone through your list as thoroughly as if you were about to meet God before the throne of Judgment and determined to get right everything you can, you may burn your list and leave your sins forgiven and forgotten for good! Wrongs may not be wiped out completely from your mind, but they can be exchanged for memories of the joy of forgiveness! Should Satan try to recall a dark past shadow, you will be able to think instead of the bright memory of confession and forgiveness. The word of pardon from those who accept our confession will put wings on our hearts and move us mightily to praise God for His forgiveness.

Many millions are gaoled in their own guilt this very day in your world, not knowing what to do or who to turn to. To some, suicide seems the only possible escape. Minds are snapping from the terrible load of guilt from a filthy past. It is up to you now to put into practice what you know must be done. Your testimony will be a ray of hope to anyone you come in contact with.

Now, don’t just READ this; in His Name, go and DO IT! :)

—SOURCE UNKNOWN

“All the Spirit’s operations, how rough soever some of them may appear, are always useful to believers, and tend to make them fruitful. To this end the most sharp influences contribute as well as the more comfortable.” —JAMES DURHAM

What is worldliness?

by Christopher Alexion

The apostle shows us that while true worldliness has several facets, its essence is this: accepting the outlook of the unbelieving world...

Spurgeon once said that Methodism was a noble thing for the unconverted but terrible for the children of God. The same observation might be made of Anabaptism. Like Spurgeon at the Primitive Methodist chapel that snowy morning, I was awakened from spiritual darkness through sermons from an Anabaptist tape ministry. I even learned much from these sincere people and their devotion to practical, holy living. But serious doctrinal problems underlie Anabaptist theology, and error invariably affects practice.

The question of what constitutes worldliness is one such area. I once believed, with the Anabaptists, that worldliness involves drinking, smoking, watching movies, and other pursuits. But when I got a better grasp of biblical teaching, I saw worldliness in much sharper perspective. The Reformers and the Reformed didn't identify Godliness with abstinence from certain activities. Luther drank wine, and Calvin indulged in such worldly pleasures as bowling. Spurgeon himself was noted for a love of fine cigars! Rather, these men saw the battle with worldliness as grounded in a holy frame of mind rather than avoidance of fundamentalist taboos. 'To think of worldliness only in those terms,' as James Boice wrote, 'is to trivialize what is a far more serious and far more subtle problem.'

A closer examination of such texts as Romans 12:2—'Be not conformed to the world', or 1 John 2:15—'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world', reveals that, while true worldliness has several facets, its essence is an acceptance of the presuppositions of the world. This is the heart of Paul's exhortation in Romans 12. After urging his readers not to be conformed to the world, Paul adds that we are to be 'transformed by the renewing of [our] mind.' Paul, in a manner certainly inconsistent with the anti-intellectual pietism of our day, places the emphasis on our thinking. He does this because from the heart (the mind) flow the issues of life (Prov. 4:23, cf. Matt. 15:17-20).

The mind is the battleground of the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Paul insists that 'though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds), casting down imaginations [arguments, NKJV], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ' (2 Cor. 10:3-5). This is what lies behind the apostle's warning that we be not deceived by 'philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the

rudiments [first principles, presuppositions] of the world, and not after Christ' (Col. 2:8).

Christians must not bow to the first principles of the world because Christ is not only their Saviour, He is Lord of their intellects. Knowledge, for the Christian, is inseparable from Christ and His revelation. He is the Logos (Jn. 1:1), the 'wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1:24, 30), in whom 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' are hid (Col. 2:3).

When Christians think in a manner inconsistent with these great truths, they are being worldly. Some Christians evince their worldliness by defending the faith by a compromise with the assumed autonomy of their opponents' minds. Some do it by changing the corporate worship of God into a self-help program. Others shun matter itself as almost sinful, and even ascribe evil to inanimate objects.

All this is not to say that worldliness has nothing to do with our outward actions. There are such entities as sins, and Christians, who have been redeemed from sin, are called to walk worthy of this redemption. To use salvation as a shield for sin is wrong. But misleading, superficial definitions of worldliness and the relegation of the intellect to the darkest corner of our pietistic life is no less wrong. And that's one sin we ought to avoid.

The modern 'gospel'?

It fails to make men God-centred in their thoughts and God-fearing in their hearts because this is not primarily what it is trying to do. One way of stating the difference between it and the old gospel is to say that it is too exclusively concerned to be 'helpful' to man—to bring peace, comfort, happiness, satisfaction—and too little concerned to glorify God. The old gospel was 'helpful', too - more so, indeed, than is the new—but (so to speak) incidentally, for its first concern was always to give glory to God... Its centre of reference was unambiguously God. But in the new gospel the centre of reference is man... Whereas the chief aim of the old was to teach people to worship God, the concern of the new seems limited to making them feel better. The subject of the old gospel was God and his ways with men; the subject of the new is man and the help God gives him. There is a world of difference. The whole perspective and emphasis of gospel preaching has changed.

—J.I. PACKER

What do you think of Jesus Christ?

No human question is more pivotal. No thoughtful answer fails to stretch our language, our categories or our aspirations.

In recent years numerous books have been written about Jesus, books that are shaped by faith or skepticism or follow the Western academic quest for the historical Jesus. The result has been a kaleidoscope of Jesuses, a thicket of viewpoints, some troubling to faith, some puzzling to the intellect, and a few that enrich our vision as they explore familiar terrain from new and promising angles.

The view is different for one who has followed Christ with heart, mind, soul and strength—it is a vision of Christ whose portrait is discerned in the mosaic pattern of Scripture, whose influence is traced in the great currents of history, and whose compelling call has shaped the story line of ordinary humans who have been charged with extraordinary faith and courage.

The minimalist criteria for weighing the authenticity of Jesus' sayings and deeds yield only a thin outline of Jesus, the barely discernible image of a Jewish sage or prophet. But the criteria of Scripture's testimony and the effective power of Jesus in lives and history point to a multidimensional Christ who defies categorization and measurement. Jesus is the one figure who, like no others, has changed lives, shaped culture and offers one sure hope for the future. He is the incomparable Christ.

—JOHN STOTT