

Time For Self-Evaluation

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As we find ourselves in the Passover season once again, many of us expect trials to mount in intensity or number in the next few weeks. Each year Satan seems to apply pressures and stresses to rush us through the holy days without our taking the time to consider the wonderful benefits this season brings.

Prior to the Days of Unleavened Bread, we examine all of the labels on the food items we purchase to make sure we do not bring leaven, a type of sin, into our homes. The process of finding and putting out leaven takes time, but in amplifying the principle of the putting of leaven out, God wants us to examine something else.

This *something else* is very difficult to examine, because God asks us through Paul to examine *ourselves* (II Corinthians 13:5).

Ways of Self-Examination

We generally take one of two approaches to self-examination. The first is something on the order of, "I'm no good. I've never lived up to my expectations. I'm just worthless."

Some of us hail from some pretty painful backgrounds. A handful have been molested and feel worthless because of it. Others have been told they were useless from childhood and have a very low opinion of themselves. Many have just had terrible experiences that have left scars, making accurate self-examination very difficult.

We may not like ourselves, and we wonder how anyone else could like us—especially God. We may look at ourselves, at the plethora of mistakes that dot our past and judge ourselves harshly. In some cases, we feel we are unworthy to take the Passover.

The second approach to self-examination is just the opposite. Here we give ourselves a quick once-over and go on our way. Like the man in James 1 who looks in the mirror, sees what he is but immediately forgets, some of us fail to give our lives a thorough evaluation.

We may think, "Well, in Romans 7 it shows that Paul sinned. He didn't want to, but the sin in him caused him to. Man will never be perfect until the return of Christ. If Paul couldn't overcome sin, then I guess that God knows that we really can't get out *all the sin*. I'll try, but if it's too hard, I'm sure that God will understand." A person who uses this approach may feel he is taking the Passover seriously, but in fact has not done a proper self-examination.

What Must We Do?

What is God asking us to do in examining ourselves?

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. (I Corinthians 11:27-28)

"Examine" (*dokimazo*) means to prove, to test, to determine if metal is pure. It connotes approval rather than condemnation. Our self-evaluation is an honest inspection to see if we are progressing as God expects us to. He wants us to see what the attitude of our heart is! *Then* we can take the Passover confidently with a right heart.

When Paul says "examine yourself," he is not referring to an "out-of-body experience," yet it could be likened to that. God wants us to stand to one side and look at ourselves, making an *honest evaluation* of our progress over the past year.

Some of us do not truly realize what a wonderful season this is. We can fool ourselves all year long by rarely studying, praying sporadically and maintaining our vices, but if we remotely care what God thinks of us, we are forced to face our true natures in this self-examination. God wants us to do this for our own good. He wants us to see what we need to work on and change.

He wants us to worship Him in Spirit and truth (John 4:24). He wants us to be honest in our evaluation. Though we often dredge up past problems and old feelings from childhood of which we have long ago repented, God wants us to examine our present state. We must look for flaws we have now and seriously and positively make the necessary changes in our lives.

Our Standard of Measure

Of course, we measure ourselves against Jesus Christ, the perfect man, who possesses all the fruit of God's Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24). These qualities are aspects of God's character that we all need to have and use:

Love : Outgoing concern for others. True concern for all of mankind. Not being self-centered. Doing for others what is right, despite their character, appearance, social status, etc. (I Corinthians 13).

Joy : Related to happiness, only happiness requires right circumstances where joy does not. Jesus Christ felt joy though He faced heavy trials (Hebrews 12:2). We should all be joyful having been called by God.

Peace : Peace of mind and peace with God (Philippians 4:6-7).

Longsuffering : Bearing with others who are working out their salvation. Being slow to anger (Romans 15:1; Luke 21:19).

Kindness : Behaving toward others kindly, as God has behaved toward us (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Goodness : Generosity of spirit that springs from imitating Jesus Christ (Psalm 33:4-5).

Faithfulness : Being reliable. This describes a person who is trustworthy and will always stand up for God's way. We can count on, and should work at imitating, the faithfulness of God (Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 13:5).

Gentleness : Considerate and tactful in conduct and correction. Never angry at the wrong time (Matthew 5:22-24; Ephesians 4:26).

Self-Control : Discipline which gives us victory over the wrong pulls of our mind and body (I John 2:15-17).

The Price of Change

What keeps us from making an honest examination? Occasionally, we find ourselves so busy before Passover that we feel we just cannot take the time it requires.

More often, however, it is not a matter of time but of expense. A true self-examination costs us something. We may clearly see where changes are needed, but the price of those changes is painful. The less we want to make the changes we must make, the more it hurts.

To change, we have to deny the pulls of our human nature, which will desperately fight back. So, to avoid the trouble and the pain, we will skirt the depths of our self-evaluation.

In spite of how we feel about examining ourselves, God still wants us to review our lives this past year honestly and make the needed changes. As we go to God in prayer and fasting, asking Him to help us see ourselves, we must remember that God loves us to the full. Even if we find a major problem area, God is ready and eager to forgive us upon repentance and change. He knows and understands the trials and pressures we face in this end time.

Psalms 103:1-19 is very encouraging as we begin our yearly self-examination. God forgives all our iniquities (verse 3-4). He is merciful and gracious and slow to anger (verse 8). He does not deal with or punish us according to our sins (verse 10), but removes our transgressions completely (verse 11-12). If we have a true fear of God, we have nothing to be afraid of (verse 13). He knows our limitations and remembers we are human (verse 14-16).

We have a marvelous God who wants us to plan to take time before Passover for the self-examination we all need. Do this and you will be able to take the Passover with thankfulness and joy, not in heaviness or doubt. And you *will* have a wonderful Passover season!