Thought For The Week

Articles: *Examine Who?* ~1,700 words, ~300 words

Examine Who?

We are remarkably skilled at spotting the faults of others. A brother or sister makes a mistake, and we see it at once. We can recount what they did, what they failed to do, and how it affected the rest of us. Yet when the same mirror is turned toward our own lives, the image grows strangely dim. The question that frames this study is simple and searching: Examine who?

The question arises from a familiar human pattern. In one of the brotherhood papers, a recent series of articles addressed the purity of doctrine. Within those pages, a well-known brother associated with Apologetics Press raised the idea that elders should be periodically re-evaluated. The suggestion provoked strong reaction, and rightly so, for the Scriptures give no warrant for such a practice. What the episode illustrated, however, is the ease with which we turn our attention outward. We can identify someone else's supposed shortcomings with clarity while remaining largely unaware of our own. As one preacher observed, "We can see someone else's mistakes much better than we can see self's faults." It is far easier to say, "Did you see what they did?" than to ask, "What about me?"

A workplace story makes the same point concrete. A line leader who acted more like a plant manager eventually left, and another man was placed in her role. Almost immediately, coworkers began pointing out what someone else on the line was or was not doing. The new leader stopped the talk. He reminded the group that department heads and the owner of the company were the ones responsible for oversight. If performance fell short of what the job required, those in authority would make it known. What each person needed to examine was the name on his or her own paycheck. If the amount or the conditions were unsatisfactory, the remedy lay in one's own work and one's own conversation with those who could actually change things. Peer scrutiny of others' duties was neither helpful nor appropriate. The principle is biblical: responsibility is personal.

Take Heed to Yourselves

The first Scripture reading of the morning, Acts 20:28, states the principle with apostolic clarity. Paul, addressing the elders of the Ephesian church at Miletus, charges them: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." The order is deliberate. Before they shepherd the flock, they must take heed to themselves. The Holy Spirit, not human tradition or the preferences of translators, has made them overseers. Their authority is real because it is given by God through the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Those passages do not describe men who are merely "examples" in the sense of having no distinctive responsibility. They describe men who meet specific qualifications and thereby serve as overseers. The same Spirit who breathed out the Scriptures has appointed them to that work. To deny the authority while affirming the example is to read the text selectively.

First Peter 5:1-5 reinforces the same balance. Peter, writing as a fellow elder and as an apostle, exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock of God, serving as overseers willingly and eagerly, "not as

being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." They are not to domineer, yet they are overseers. Younger people are told to submit to their elders. Then the same passage broadens the call: "All of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Authority and example are not opposites. Mutual submission and humility do not erase the distinct role the Holy Spirit has assigned to elders. Even in a congregation that may not currently have elders, the principle remains: we submit to one another in the fear of God, and we do not invent structures the Scriptures never authorized.

Examining Ourselves at the Table

The second reading, 1 Corinthians 11:27-28, presses the same self-examination into the heart of the Lord's Supper. "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 the bread and drink of the cup." Some have taken "unworthy manner" to mean that the participant must first decide whether he or she is personally worthy. None of us is worthy if the standard is perfect sinlessness. The Corinthian problem, however, was not a general sense of unworthiness. It was a specific and public abuse. The Supper had been reduced to a common meal. Some ate ahead of others. One went hungry while another became drunk. In that setting, Paul asks whether they do not have houses in which to eat and drink, and whether they despise the church of God by shaming those who have nothing.

The passage has sometimes been used to forbid any meal in the church building. The context, however, is the Lord's Supper itself. The Corinthians were not waiting for one another. They were treating the memorial of Christ's death as an ordinary gathering where personal appetite and social status took precedence. The call to examine oneself is therefore a call to discern the body and blood of the Lord. When we take the bread and the cup, we are to focus on the fact that He died for me. Yes, He died for you as well, and for those still outside. But the examination is individual. What does His death mean for me? Am I treating this memorial as the proclamation of His death until He comes, or have I allowed it to become something else?

The one who eats and drinks without discerning the Lord's body eats and drinks judgment to himself. The remedy is not to abstain from the Supper but to examine oneself and then to partake. Christ sacrificed His life for each of us and for the world. His blood continues to cleanse those who walk in the light. That is the reality we are to hold in view when we come to the table.

Test Yourselves

Second Corinthians 13:5 widens the examination beyond the Supper. "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified." The command is collective and individual, yet it is not an invitation to evaluate brothers and sisters by name. The question is whether Christ is in me. If I am disqualified, I am not with Him. The test is personal. Am I in the faith? Is my life marked by the presence and the lordship of Jesus Christ? The answer cannot be borrowed from the perceived faithfulness of someone else.

Galatians 6:1-4 supplies the practical shape of that examination when we encounter another's failure. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he

deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." Restoration is required, but it must be gentle, and it must be accompanied by self-examination. The one who helps must remember that he too can be tempted. We are to bear one another's burdens, yet we are not to measure our standing by the failures of others. When we stand before God, the judgment will not be based on what someone else did or failed to do. It will be based on what we ourselves have done, whether good or bad.

The workplace illustration returns here in a different key. When someone else is not carrying his share of the load, the temptation is to resent the extra weight and to make the comparison public. The biblical response is to do the work that has been given to us and to refuse the illusion that our diligence makes another person look bad. Each of us will answer for his own work. The standard is not the performance of the person beside us. The standard is the will of God for us.

Christ's Sacrifice and Our Response

All of these texts converge on a single reality. Christ made the sacrifice for each of us while we were still ungodly sinners. He died for those who are still outside. The water of life He offers is pure because its source is pure; it is not mixed or diminished by human invention. Those who turn to Him in repentance, confess His name, and are buried with Him in baptism receive the washing away of past sins. As they walk in the light, His blood continues to cleanse them from all sin. The notion that one remains simply "a doer" of sin no matter how one lives is not the teaching of Scripture. Walking in the life brings the continual cleansing of the perfect sacrifice.

For those who have named the name of Christ and then departed, the same blood remains sufficient. The disqualified can be restored. The church can pray, and God, who is faithful and just, will forgive. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, without blemish. It is His blood that cleanses. The invitation, therefore, is not an afterthought. It is the natural conclusion of self-examination. If the mirror of Scripture shows us our need, why not come? Why not answer the call while we stand and sing?

The question remains: Examine who? The consistent answer of these passages is that we examine ourselves. We take heed to our own souls before we attempt to shepherd others. We discern the body and blood of the Lord when we come to the table. We test whether we are in the faith. We restore the fallen with gentleness while considering ourselves. And we rest, finally, not in our comparative performance but in the perfect sacrifice of the One who purchased the church with His own blood. That is the examination that matters.

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Examine Who?

We are quick to notice the faults of others and slow to see our own. A recent discussion in one of the brotherhood papers about re-evaluating elders illustrated the point: it is easy to focus outward while remaining unaware of what needs attention in our own lives. The Scriptures call us to a different habit.

Acts 20:28 charges elders to “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock.” Before they shepherd others, they must watch themselves. Their role as overseers comes from the Holy Spirit through the God-breathed Word, not from human preference. First Peter 5 reminds us that they serve as examples, not as lords, and that all of us are to be clothed with humility.

At the Lord’s Supper, 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 calls each person to examine himself. The Corinthian problem was not a general feeling of unworthiness; it was the way they turned the Supper into a common meal, some eating ahead of others. The examination we are given is to discern the body and blood of the Lord—to remember that He died for me—and then to partake.

Second Corinthians 13:5 broadens the same call: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.” Galatians 6 adds that when we help restore someone overtaken in a trespass, we do so gently, considering ourselves, and that each one must examine his own work. God will judge us according to what we have done, not according to the failures of others.

Christ died for the ungodly. His blood continues to cleanse those who walk in the light. Self-examination is not meant to leave us discouraged; it is meant to turn us toward the perfect sacrifice who purchased the church with His own blood. Examine yourself. Then rest in Him.

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