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# Examine Yourself

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Anthony Burgess

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## ANTHONY BURGESS

Anthony Burgess was a nonconformist clergyman and writer who lived in the mid-seventeenth century. He was the son of a schoolmaster at Watford in Hertfordshire, England. He entered St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1623, and graduated with a master's degree. He then became a fellow at Emmanuel College, where he tutored John Wallis. Wallis, who also was a member of the Westminster Assembly, described his tutor as "a pious, learned, and able scholar, a good disputant, a good tutor, an eminent preacher, a sound and orthodox divine."

Burgess served as vicar at Sutton-Coldfield in Warwickshire from 1635 to 1662, except for some years in the 1640s. During the civil war, Burgess fled to Coventry for safety from the king's army. The king's soldiers persecuted Puritan pastors with relish, often rifling their houses and forcing out their families. From Coventry, Burgess joined the Westminster Assembly of divines, where he became known for theological astuteness and piety. During his years in London, he frequently preached to Parliament and at Lawrence-Jury.

After the Westminster Assembly, Burgess returned to Sutton-Coldfield. He was ejected from there by the Uniformity Act of 1662 after the Restoration. He retired to Tamworth, Staffordshire, where he attended a parish church until his death.

Burgess was a prolific writer. During a fifteen-year span (1646-1661), he wrote at least a dozen books based largely on his sermons and lectures. This sermon has been taken from his magnum opus, *Spiritual Refining*, a massive, two-volume work of 1100 pages that has been called an "unequaled anatomy of experimental religion."

## Examine Yourself

*“Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves.”*

— 2 Corinthians 13:5

The church of Corinth, though it was a garden immediately planted by the apostles, yet quickly was filled with choking weeds of unbelief and of corrupt manners, whereupon the apostle threatens it with severe discipline if they repent not—ecclesiastical discipline being in the church as the sword is in the commonwealth. The Corinthians chafe under this severity, and immediately resort to questioning his apostolical power and authority. Being lovers of their lusts (as all mankind is wont to be) and having a desire of security in them rather than any solid arguments, makes also these Corinthians question the divine right of Christ's institutions. The apostle, however, proves his calling by that spiritual success and powerful efficacy which his word had among them, and, therefore, instead of proving and examin-

ing him, they are exhorted to examine their own hearts.

In the words of the text, therefore, lies the necessary exhortation, defined by 1. The duty commanded thereof, and 2. That duty's objective as well as the consequence if this duty be neglected.

The duty is set home in two emphatical words, *examine yourselves* and *prove yourselves*. The former word does in general signify to take an experimental knowledge of anything that is uncertain, unknown, or hidden. Hence that knowledge which we have by general arguments and abstract reasons cannot be called an experimental knowledge. Now, besides the bare knowledge, there may be in the general sense also a good end or bad propounded in examination; therefore, in an ill sense the words can be applied to the devil and his instruments, and in a good sense to God, but here in the text are applied to the church and to ourselves. It is further to be observed that these words do imply that men are great strangers to themselves, and that so much self-love does blind them that

they do not know their own hearts or motives. Furthermore, these words also imply that there are certain marks and signs whereby a man may come to know certainly what he is: otherwise this command would be in vain. To the same purpose these words also enjoin a severe and diligent inquisition into ourselves, so as to have a full experience of what is in us.

It is a duty that should be of special concern for the people of God in order to be assured of such a true and saving work of grace in them, since thereby they shall be differentiated from unsound hypocrites.

There are certain notes and signs of grace whereby a man may discern what he is.

A practical and experimental knowledge of grace does far transcend a mere notional and theoretical knowledge: there is a great difference for him who has merely heard honey is sweet, and him who has actually tasted it. It is a rule among the Hebrews that words of knowledge do sometimes signify the affections in the heart and the consequent effects thereof in life. How well it would be if they did

always have such significance among Christians! In former times Christians strove diligently after an experimental knowledge; now they are content with a mere brain-knowledge.

Now, when the apostle Paul commands us to prove and try ourselves, it is for the purpose that we would endeavor to sense that that which we persuade ourselves is in us by the implantation of a new nature is actually being worked out in our daily walk and life. For example, many a man thinks he is a believer, he is regenerated; to prove or try himself is to apply those notes and marks which the Scripture makes of such, and thereby to have an experimental feeling of the actual exercise of these things. In Philippians 1:9, the apostle distinguishes it from knowledge and judgment, calling this sense or feeling to be the inward savory sense and feeling of divine things upon their hearts.

Now, this practical, experimental work of grace in ourselves, whereby we are able to discern what is true, or what is imperfect and counterfeit, is very necessary and

will be made manifest from several grounds, such as these:

First, our Savior did in His sermons much press this point upon His hearers. If it's true, as the heathen say, that when a wise man speaks he opens the rich treasures and wardrobe as it were of his mind, how much more true of Christ, in whom are the treasures of wisdom! And of all His teachings on the practical points in divinity, our Savior is most frequently on this which comprised His first parable in Matthew 13, namely, that it is crucial to show the difference of true grace from that which is superficial, and He presents it, furthermore, as being a matter of great concern. In the parallell account in Luke 8:8 after the parable was ended, Jesus cried, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Although that exhortation is not included in the body of the text containing the parable, Christ's words clearly show that His affections were very earnest and the matter is of great importance. It is also to be noted that He speaks to the multitude that thronged after Him with great attention;

yet to such He declares that few have a good and honest heart to receive the Word. When, therefore, our Savior Himself shall thus warn, that you may in the use of the ordinances find much alteration made in yourselves—that you may have joy, faith, some kind of reformation, and yet not be the good and right soil—what a provocation should this be to us never to leave off or be content until we be truly qualified.

Our Savior also tells another parable with this same purpose (Matt. 25:1-13), about the ten virgins, five of whom are wise, five foolish. All are virgins, that is, such who had preserved themselves from the idolatries and gross vices of the world. Both groups had lamps, they both go with confidence to meet the bridegroom, and there is no differentiation of one from the other until the bridegroom comes. We are warned by this parable that a professor of religion, having no more than a false, imperfect, or counterfeit work of grace, may seemingly live and die with a great deal of comfort and confidence, as if his condition

were exceeding good, but not find it otherwise until it is too late.

Again, consider Matthew 7:24-26, the parable of two kind of builders—one upon the sand, and the other upon the rock. What is represented is two kinds of believers. One has not only the outward profession and way of Christianity, but is also truly rooted upon Christ. But there is another who builds upon the sand, who digs not deep enough; and this is the greatest part of professing Christians: your faith, your repentance, your joy are not deep enough. Now mark the consequence: the fall thereof was great. Your damnation will be so much the more terrible, when all your religious duties, all your external profession shall fall to the ground. And it is a fall by way of rending, as the word signifies. Oh how woeful to be rent from God, and those duties which you trusted in! Therefore our Savior says in verse 22 that many will call to Him at that day, “Have not we prophesied in thy name, eaten and drunk in thy presence?”—that is, offered sacrifices and received sacraments? But in spite

of all that Christ knows them not. By all this you see how necessary it is we be not deceived about the work of grace, and that we ought to examine ourselves carefully, lest we take a whole spiritual estate in counterfeit coin.

Second, this experimental knowledge is of great consequence, also because of the easiness and proneness in us to mistake our true condition. Augustine said of the doctrine of the Trinity, "In nothing is the error more easy and more dangerous"; the same is applicable to this matter, for the exhortation for examining and proving do imply the deceitfulness of our heart, that there are many false shapes and forms upon it. Hence come those phrases of searching our hearts and communing with our hearts; all which argue the difficulty of being fully acquainted with what is in it. The Roman Catholics indeed press this too far, as if none could ever tell when they did truly love God, or had a sincere heart; but the falseness of this is in time to be shown. Nevertheless, there is much truth in this, that there is so much self-love and

carnal confidence in us, that we easily persuade ourselves that we are indeed such as we ought to be. Ask every man one after another: Who is not confident that he is regenerated, that he has an interest in Christ, that his heart is good? And why are they so? Is it not precisely because they do not faithfully compare the notes and characters of true grace, and diligently apply them to their own selves? Similarly, the Jews and Pharisees of Jesus' day had the same delusion and could never be beaten out of those vain hopes and carnal confidences. Hence the apostle uses an emphatical word of a Jew, Romans 2:17, "[Thou] retest in the law," or, in other words, Thou art secure in the law, as in some admirable privilege and signal testimony of God's love. That which Christ promised, namely, rest to their souls, they vainly imagined they found in the law instead, so that no load of sin could burden them because they had their own rest here. As it is thus of a Jew, so we may say of a superficial Christian—he rests in the doctrine of the gospel, and the outward use of ordinances,

not feeling the weight of sin. Insomuch that it would be far better to see people pray with fear and eat their bread with trembling and astonishment lest they have gone no further yet than hypocrites, than to be so carnally and falsely persuaded of their good condition as they are. How many are indeed but glow-worms, or white rotten trees, of base materials, though some shining there be in their conversation! Therefore this text might be fastened upon the gates of the whole world, upon every door, every post: *Examine, prove yourselves!*

Thirdly, it is very dangerous to miscarry in this matter. Oh the confusion that fell upon the foolish virgins when their lack of oil was discovered! How wary are you of taking clipped silver, or counterfeit coin? It is a great danger to take counterfeit repentance for true repentance, counterfeit faith for true faith. If your praying and professing be not good and sound, you are undone forever. When the apostle in Hebrews 6 had reckoned up several particulars, which many among us do not

attain unto, such as that they were enlightened, they tasted of the good word of God, and they were partakers of the Holy Ghost, yet, says he, I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation. What thunder and lightnings are here! Better things than illumination, than partaking of the Holy Ghost, better things than tasting of the good word of God? What, are not these things that do accompany salvation? Must we not therefore cry out with the disciples, as in another case, this is an hard saying, who then can be saved? Yet so it is! We ministers of God's Word must preach that except your righteousness exceed that of outward profession, of repeating of sermons, of family duties, of common works of God's Spirit which are in temporary believers, you can never enter into the kingdom of heaven; and therefore we hope and pray for better things of you, even such as will surely accompany salvation.

Fourthly, this practical discerning is of consequence because of the difficulty to find out the true differences between grace

and its counterfeit. It is hard, doctrinally, to lay down the bounds wherein they differ, insomuch that some divines declare the work of grace in the temporary believer to differ from that of the regenerated person in gradation or extent only, not of kind. But that is a false explanation. If then it be thus hard by way of doctrine to set the bounds, how much more is it difficult for Christians in their practice to mark out the right way? The hypocrite feels a joy, feels a sorrow, feels a sweetness in the ordinances, and so does the godly. But to show how one can be sure when he is or when he is not deceived, is hard, though indeed they do differ as much as the seeming reality of a dream by him who is dreaming, compared to actual reality of things by him that is truly awake and knows he is not in a dream. Therefore, the commands to *try* and *prove*, do presuppose that a man must have knowledge of the rule and the marks which do describe such a grace; he must also have skillfulness in discerning, by way of application, whether these marks are in himself, and this must

be done especially in times of trial, with much attending and persevering thereunto. For as in all doctrinal controversies, the great question and problem lies in discerning that which is of the true church or that which is not, and what are the essential marks that do constitute a church. A similar dilemma, practically speaking, lies in discerning what is the truth of grace, whether I be the man that have it, and what are the notes to decipher it? And as for the former question, we would fain have some visible infallible judge to determine it that there might be no more dispute. So similarly, here, we would desire such a peculiar revelation from heaven that should by name declare unto us that we are those Christians in whom is no guile.

Fifthly, it is of concern because of the manifold advantages that will come to us when we have attained to such an experimental knowledge of ourselves.

We shall account all our former knowledge of divine things and all our parts, though ever so admirable, to have been but like a tinkling cymbal. When you come

to have this inward sense of holy things imprinted upon your heart, you will bewail all your duties, spiritual conversations, and religious performances done by yourself as a parrot that had no understanding of these things. If a man read in a book, or see on a map such and such countries, he has indeed some apparent knowledge, but if he travel into those countries and see the towns and buildings, he will say that his former apprehension of them was but lame to what he has now; or as the Queen of Sheba, who had heard rumors of Solomon's wisdom, when she came to have an experimental knowledge of it, was then astonished, and said that all she had heard was nothing compared to that which she saw.

So it is in matter of grace: if God work these savory inward marks of grace in you, you will be astonished to see the difference between yourself now and what you were; all that you have heard, read, or preached, is nothing to that which you now feel. How fearful then that many have seen godliness from book-knowledge only, but

they never had experience of the thing itself. How many are there that talk of conversion or repentance, as men do of bringing forth a child, who never had the experience of the throbs and pains that then are endured. Even the apostle Paul walked a long time on a road of religious duties, but when he came to have an experimental work within himself, he died, whereas he thought he was alive before; that is, he became sensible of the damnable and dangerous estate he was in, whereas he had formerly had great confidence of his good life and salvation. And thus it is with every man that has obtained experimental knowledge. He says, "I was alive once, I thought myself some body, when I could pray, write sermons, dispute so understandingly, but now I see I did not know what that faith was, or godliness was, or about that which I did so much argue; I never truly knew anything of God, or of His gracious works until now."

There remain more advantages, which will accrue to a Christian, that besides a general "notion-knowledge" hath a prac-

tical and experimental discovery of grace in his heart:

First, He will enjoy the sweetness and benefit of the ordinances, which men of abilities and gifts only do not. How many are there who in our church administrations are like old Barzillai that had lost his taste and hearing, and so cared not for David's feasts and music? In Psalm 19, David preferreth God's Word in sweetness above the honey and honey-comb. Psalm 84 is spent in admiring the loveliness and beauty of God's ordinances: Now sadly, a man without the experimental work of grace upon his soul can no more be affected with these than a blind man can be with colors. Song of Solomon 1:3 says, "Because of thy ointment poured forth, therefore the virgins love thee." Christ in His ordinances doth, as Mary, open a box of ointment which diffuseth a spiritual savor in church assemblies to the godly, and this only the experimental Christian feels. Thus also may the ministers of God, preaching either of the bitterness of sin, the sadness of spiritual desertions, or the full-

ness of Christ, the sweetness of His fellowship and communion, say, "The practiced, exercised Christian knows what I mean; formal customary Christians are strangers unto that virtue and efficacy which is communicated in spiritual ordinances."

In Song of Solomon 4:12 the church is compared to a garden shut up, a fountain sealed, which is to be understood not only in respect of the defence and protection God vouchsafeth His church, that none can destroy her, but also, because strangers and wicked men are not able to drink of her delicacies, or smell of her sweetness. A spiritual sermon is a fountain sealed up, the spiritual administration of a sacrament is a garden enclosed. Superficial Christians understand not nor perceive the full sweetness thereof. There were many people in a throng and crowd about our Savior, but only the infirm woman felt the efficacy come from Him. Although many may attend the ordinances, frequent the assemblies, few find the inward power of Christ derived unto their souls. As, therefore, Thomas, though spoken wrongly on a

false ground, said he would not believe Christ to be risen unless he saw His wounds and put his fingers into them, so neither must you believe your estate to be good and sound, unless you may see and feel the efficacy of Christ in His ordinances upon thee.

Secondly, by this practical knowledge and exercise you will be taken off from all needless and vain disputations in matters of religion, but will be more solicitous at home in your own heart. In former times when the people of God were busy about the touchstone and trial of grace in themselves, they did not launch out into such deep and unprofitable questions. But now, of late since believers have busied themselves in disputes and controversies and new opinions, this practical knowledge of grace is much neglected; you shall find men sooner disputing about faith than living by faith, talking of heavenly mindedness than being so indeed. Thus the trees in God's garden sprout up into suckers and barren boughs, and bear little fruit upon them. In 1 Timothy 6:4 the apostle

does excellently describe such a temper; he calls it "doting about questions," or as it is in the Greek, "sick and languishing." Even as much fretting and vexation consumes the flesh of the body, so do proud and vain affectations of new opinions pine away the soul. What is this but to think that a stone may become bread, and a serpent fish? As it is a minister's duty to preach only those things that are profitable, as did the sower who went out to sow good seed, not poison, or empty chaff, so it is also required of private Christians, that they do think, confer of, and study those things only that may edify and practically build up their souls.

I would not hereby discourage an endeavor in Christians to grow in knowledge. The apostle reproveth some for being babes, and that he could not speak unto them as spiritual but as carnal; but they must know that faith hath efficacious purifying acts as well as knowing acts, and, therefore, our increase must be equal in respect to knowledge and efficacy also. A Christian may grow either in the enlargement of his knowledge, not only in respect

to knowing more things than he did, but also in the manner, more clearly, evidently, and firmly than he did, or else in the efficacy of his knowledge. Though he do not know more things than he did, yet he knoweth them more practically in that they have a greater influence upon his heart and affections, and move and inflame him more than ever they did. Now, though the former way of increase be necessary and pleasing to God, yet this is much more. Take heed then that we be not like Pharaoh's lean kine, that devour many questions, but yet are as starved and ill-favored as before. When one came with a curious question to our Savior, asking Him whether many should be saved, how pertinently doth our Savior answer him, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24). This therefore discovers the necessity of importunate pressing and urging of practical knowledge upon people in these days who would rather argue than live. As little boys in sport strive to see who shall strike the most sparks out of their iron, although not intending to kindle them

thereby for their use, so do Christians strive who shall strike out the most subtle and finest spun notions, not intending the profit of their souls therein.

Thirdly, by this practical experience, a Christian shall attain to the end of all knowledge, which is to do. If you know these things, blessed are you if ye do them. It was said of some people that they had money only to tell about it; they made no other use of it. It is as vain when we have knowledge in matters of religion only to know but not to practice. In Titus 1 it is called the acknowledging of the truth after godliness; insomuch that Scripture says that they who have not the practical power of knowledge are denied to have any knowledge at all. Hence are wicked men so often called fools and said not to know God. By this means a private Christian may be said to know more of God than a learned doctor that hath nothing but orthodoxy; for an orthodox learned man may write and preach admirably about justifying faith, conversion, etc., yet in regard to the practical knowledge of these

things in no way compares to some private man or woman who feels the power of these things upon their own hearts.

It is disputed whether theology be speculative or practical, and it is resolved by many upon good grounds that it is practical, there being nothing in all religion but what is to be improved for practice one way or other. It is good that orthodoxy and true doctrine be defended by books, disputations, and sermons; but above all things we are to endeavor that our life answer our Christian profession.

Fourthly, by this experimental knowledge a man will be settled in the truth and endure all persecution rather than forsake it. He will believe no fallacies or sophisms, he will not forsake his confession because of any dangers. It's called tasting of God and His Word, and the rule is, there is no disputing against taste. The sense of taste and feeling do herein differ from the other senses in that they are joined really to the objects themselves, whereas seeing and hearing do receive only the intentional species, and therefore cannot make such a

real and powerful impression as is in tasting or feeling. Paul's experimental knowing whom he did believe made him to speak boldly. What else makes men have a monthly or yearly faith, change their opinions as often as their garments, but because they have not felt the power of truth upon their own soul? The schoolmen speak of a gift of the Holy Ghost, which they define to be a certain light of divine things whereby they are seen and tasted by experience; or others describe it as a contemplation of God out of love, with a certain experimental sweetness in the affections. But whatsoever their conceit is about this, it is certain the apostle would have us by use to have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil. In Hebrews 5:14, where the apostle attributeth to the mind which are properly the organs of sense in the body, he applies it also to the soul, because of the intuitive and experimental knowledge the soul ought to have in good things; and therefore, he speaks of use and custom which the people of God have in this spiritual discerning. No won-

der then that faith is called, in Hebrews 11, the real substance of things believed in the soul and an undeniable conviction of the mind of men; because where this grace is operative upon the soul, it makes a real impression. Hence also the whole work and way of grace is compared to life in Galatians 2:20, because it is most real; it is not in imagination and fancy. That is notable in Hebrews 13:9, where the apostle makes grace and godliness to establish and settle the heart: "Be not carried about with divers doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." Therefore, men that are led aside into errors are said to be carried about with them, a metaphor from chaff and straw, which because of its emptiness and lightness is blown this way and that way. Thus a man that is empty of grace, and not established by the power of it upon his heart runs from one opinion to another without any true foundation. Necessarily, then, a savory inward knowledge of divine truths would be an excellent ballast in the soul. And as it would thus keep the heart firm to

the truth, so it would unite the heart to holy things as the best and sweetest, without hypocrisy, double-mindedness, and inconsistency. And this is much to be considered: when thy heart is for a while for good things, but at other times is vehemently for the world, thy heart is divided between the Creator and the creature! How cometh this about? It is for lack of real and experimental knowledge of the goodness of God. He that drinketh of the pure, living water (saith Christ) shall never thirst any more, that is, with a thirst of deprivation.

Now, how great a mercy it is to be kept from that double mindedness that the apostle speaks of, to be kept from being like a wave that is sometimes tossed up high to the heavens, and then presently sinks down low in the sea; or being spared from being like the grasshoppers that leap up towards heaven, but immediately fall down to the ground. When temptations of profit and pleasure come, how easily they can be repulsed by an heart who knows of better things. Until you have an inward feeling and joy about the things of God,

you are not able to withstand other temptations, but you will always be striving to make possible that which our Savior hath pronounced so impossible: to serve God and mammon.

I shall in the next place show you what impediments and destructive principles there are to hinder us in this experimental proving by which we are to test ourselves. For this duty, here commanded, of examining and proving of ourselves is like the compound that the high priest was to make, consisting of choice materials. When we go to prove and examine ourselves, one dangerous principle is this: that being prepossessed with self-love and carnal confidence, and where this foundation is laid, it's impossible to make any good superstructure. Hence all the piercing and discovering sermons which the prophets and Christ preached unto the Jews and Pharisees could make no battery, gave no shaking to their rotten foundation, and all because they had carnal confidence and vain trust in themselves. Therefore, when thou settest upon this duty, thou must con-

fess, "Lord, I come not in any love of myself; I can as easily judge and condemn myself for an hypocrite (if such I shall be found) as approve myself for an upright one. O Lord, it shall not seem an hard thing to me, if I perceive that I have thus far been for many years laboring in vain. O Lord, it shall be so far from being matter of discontent, as that I shall rejoice, if now at length, I may be put into a sound and right way of holiness."

But how many go to search the grounds, principles, and ends of their actions with as much diligence, as some officers do ale-houses and unlawful meetings? They are unwilling to see the hidden works of darkness, unwilling to heed the warning in Proverbs 28:26, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." It is desperate folly to believe your heart will deal truly with you. Hence the prophet Jeremiah calls it "desperately wicked," or crafty; it will beguile and deceive you without much caution, insomuch that this duty of examination is but ridiculous and a mere mockery, unless we resolve to become impartial judges. It

is like disputing with the Church of Rome, who holds that the true church cannot err, and then that she is the true church, whereby she becomes incurable and without hope and healing. We are instructed in Proverbs 16:2 that "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits." Thus, false pride and confidence are one way to blind ourselves, but then we may run into another extreme, by temptation of unbelief; and thus when a godly soul, set against itself, and deeming everything that he shall do as hypocrisy, if in this case he goes to examine himself, he will also draw false conclusions. As the carnal man fails the former way, so the doubting Christian does the other way. The one believes everything to be done with a good heart, the other nothing. But as a man that would see his face in a pool of water must make no commotion at all, so he that would search his heart, must take heed of carnal confidence on one side and unbelief on the other side.

A second dangerous principle is to conclude that good works reflect an holy, God-

honoring heart, regardless of what the principles, ends, motives, or manner may have been. This destroys many thousands. Jehu did that which was according to God's will, and this made him bold to say he is zealous for God: Come see my zeal, says he. But though his actions were very great and beneficial to the church of God, yet God would avenge the blood of his slain victims upon him for those very deeds (Hosea 1:4). Who would think God would be avenged on Jehu for dispossessing Jeroboam, killing Baal's priests, making so great a reformation as he did? But because he himself did not do these things with an upright heart, he is therefore judged. Similarly, the Pharisees had an external righteousness, but there was a great gulf between them and true godliness. Hence they are called vipers, which though they have a glorious skin, yet are full of poison. How soever holy they appeared, yet, like the serpent, they eat of the dust of the earth, live upon earthly subsistence. A man, therefore, had need be eagle-eyed, or like Ezekiel's living crea-

tures, full of eyes, that would see into the bottom of his ways. Your profession, your family duties, your religious performances are plainly visible; every one you meet may read them, but the ends and motives are secret and hidden to all. As the first letters in the book are often so ornately written that we can hardly tell what they are, so, similarly, Paul distinguished between a Jew outwardly, and a Jew inwardly, namely, that circumcision of the flesh is mere outward “ornate” holiness, but circumcision of the heart reflects true holiness, especially the end and motive that doth specify and distinguish moral actions. Two may be in a family—both pray, both mourn for sin, yet because one is done upon a pure motive and principle from God and to God, therefore it is right; and the other, because it’s defective in one of these, is rejected. Who then is sufficient and prepared for so great a duty as this is?

A third principle of misguidance is manifested when we try ourselves by false rules, when we weigh with false weight. This duty of examining and proving sup-

poses there is some sure standard, which if we go by, we are sure not to be deceived. Now, that rule is the Word of God. But, as in matter of doctrine, men have departed from the Scriptures as the sure rule, and taken up antiquity, universality, tradition, and the like for their guide, and by this means have fallen into the ditch; so in matter of godliness, when we should try ourselves according to the characters and signs that the Scripture deciphers, we, instead, rely upon principles of the world, the applause of others, and the conversation of most in the world. And thus it is with us, as men in a hospital, because every one is either wounded or lame, or some way diseased, therefore none are offensive to each other.

The fourth, and another dangerous way to miscarry, is, when we have a false notion or definition about that which is to be discovered; when we mistake what godliness is, and so think it to be in us, when it is not. And in this is the grand imposture: men mistake a good nature, morality, civility, the common graces of

God's Spirit for godliness; and when they see they have these, they conclude all is well. This is as if a man digging for gold should substitute lead or copper for it, and think himself rich, because he hath these. He, therefore, that would not be deceived in this great matter must consider how the Scripture describes the nature and properties of godliness, and must not acknowledge godliness as less or inferior a thing than the Scripture makes it. If a man shall not aspire to those scriptural directions, he is but a glow-worm though he seem to be the sun.

Let the end of the matter, therefore, be to set ourselves with all diligence, fear, and trembling about this work. How much better is it to eat and drink, to pray and hear with fear and trembling of heart, than to sit down secure when there is no cause! Rely not upon your own heart in times of danger, or fears of death, or any sudden calamities. Pharaoh and Ahab may have cried out and lamented their sins under the judgments of God, but the true Christian must attend to pure motives only. Just

as under the civil law no credit is given to a testimony that is given by one upon the rack because, it is supposed, the torture and pain will make him say anything to be eased. In times of trouble and fear even a false and unsound heart will say anything, hoping for some exoneration. But, howsoever in this life we may satisfy ourselves and others with a profession and external diligence in holy duties, yet at the day of judgment we shall be astonished and silent before God, just as in the parable of the man that was at the feast without a wedding garment, when questioned, was presently speechless; he pretended not poverty nor difficulty to get a wedding garment, but was immediately speechless, even as if he had had a muzzle put on his mouth, as the word signifieth. So it will be at that Day when all the crooked and subtle excuses, all the false pretexts of your own heart will be so discovered that you cannot but see it and acknowledge it.

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