

SELF-EXAMINATION.

In 2 Cor. 13:5, Paul says, "Try your own selves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Or know ye not, your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" The context apparently shows that the Corinthians had accused Paul of having no influence over them for good, and his ministry as being weak and insignificant. Paul replies by telling them to look at their present condition as compared with their past, see the change that has taken place in their lives, see the possession they now have, and in the light of these things let them say whether his influence over them has been for good or not, or if his ministry is weak and insignificant. Again, in 1 Cor. 11:28, the same Apostle says, "Let a man examine himself." But in this Paul means only to interpose a caution to prepare the receiver to eat the Lord's supper worthily.

It is impossible to know ourselves by looking at the present. We only partly know ourselves as we see our life in the past. Every day our actions surprise us, and frequently we find that we have done the very thing we never thought we would do. I suppose Abraham did not really know the strength of his faith till called upon to sacrifice Isaac. In the light of that trial he could estimate the real strength of his faith. In the shortness of memory we fail to profit by past mistakes. In every action of ours there are so many details giving rise to so many causes of actions which may differ in each action, thus making it impossible for us to judge truly of our own condition. The Greeks had a favorite motto among their philosophers, "Know thyself;" but by this they did not mean to teach that by merely looking into their own actions they came to understand their own character and became able to estimate their real worth, but [R1516 : page 119] rather that each one should examine the basis and facts of his philosophy for

himself, and not be content to receive them second-hand. Then, again, many people do not grow better from rigid self-introspection. The bad only see good and excuses for the evil in their lives. The good only see evil in theirs, and sadden their lives by deploring it. One of the saintliest women I ever knew, and whom all revered, began to direct her attention to her own life, to examine it, to search it, and to question whether she did truly believe or not, till in a few months she concluded she had no faith, that her life was full of evil deeds, that she was unsaved and had no hope, and that there was none for her; and in this state she lives to-day.

We make a distinction between *heart*-searching and *life*-searching, which many fail to make. Our hearts, that is our *wills*, should be perfect; but our lives cannot be perfect, because "we have this treasure [our new wills or new hearts] in earthen vessels [in imperfect bodies]." He, therefore, who judges of his acceptableness with God by judging of his perfection or imperfection in thought, word and deed, must condemn himself, if he be honest and if he have a proper estimate of perfection in these respects. But he that judges his *heart*, his motives, his will, his intentions, should always be able to find it *true* to the Lord, – however much his life may come short of his new will, – the mind of Christ begotten in him by the exceeding great and precious promises of God's Word.

We are not merely to ask ourselves whether we love God, but also whether our love takes the practical form of *willing* and *trying* to *serve* God. This, his Word indicates, is the real [R1517 : page 119] test; – not what we *succeed* in doing, but what we honestly and earnestly *try* to do.

The mother never questions whether she loves her children or not, but shows her love by her services; the industrious man

never stops to wonder if he is industrious. Christ says, He that heareth my words and doeth them, he it is that loveth me.

We can know our hearts only as God, who sits as a refiner of gold, tries us: under the hand of his proving we learn to know ourselves. God does the searching to see if there be any evil way in us. He searches, tries and proves us, and not we our own hearts. The Christian only grows Godlike, strong in faith and hope, as he learns to look away from himself to the Son of Man. It is said that one of the gifted painters of the world stood before the masterpiece of the greatest genius of the age. This he never hoped to rival, nor even to equal, yet the infinite superiority did not crush him, nor cause him to despair. He saw realized those conceptions that had long floated vaguely before him in unsubstantial form; in every line and touch he felt a spirit immeasurably superior. As he stood gazing at it his heart swelled with emotion, his feelings became elevated, and he turned away exclaiming, "And I, too, am a painter." Let the hesitating believer look on Christ, the embodiment of the highest and holiest of all conceptions, till his heart can feel his spirit and touch, then he can turn to the world, believing and declaring, "I, too, am a Christian."

– *Sel.*
