

Examine Yourself

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When God set his hand to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, he commanded a Passover sacrifice to be offered, and afterward, it was to be offered yearly on the fourteenth of the first month of the sacred calendar. Only those who were ritually clean were, under ordinary circumstances, permitted to partake of the Passover sacrifice.

To be ritually clean, one had to know what that meant, what measures had to be taken to meet the standard of cleanliness required. To do that implies that one had to examine his behavior, and his condition, based on certain standards.

Faithful Christians baptized into the body of Christ, having learned to keep his festivals as he commands, are also expected to examine ourselves, especially as we approach the Passover, not only at this time of year, but on a continual basis. Let me explain from the Scriptures what that means and how to go about it.

When Hezekiah became king of Judah about 726 B.C., he instituted reforms to rid the land of idolatry and restore the worship of Yahweh at the Temple in Jerusalem. The work of cleansing and repairing the Temple and restoring the worship of the God of Israel was begun in the first year of Hezekiah's reign, in the first month (2 Chronicles 29:3; the first month of the sacred calendar is in the Spring in the northern hemisphere).

Now Passover was to be kept in the **first month**. But God allowed that in case of Levitical uncleanness, or other circumstances that prevented keeping the Passover at the usual time, it could be kept the **second month**. God instructed Moses, "If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or is far away on a journey, he may still keep the Lord's Passover. On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it" (Numbers 9:10-11).

So Hezekiah and the faithful leaders among Jews agreed to keep the Passover that first year of his reign in the second month. Moreover, he sent invitations to all the tribes of Israel in what had been the land of Canaan who had not yet been taken captive, to join in keeping the Passover. This was more than two hundred years after the United Kingdom of Israel had been divided into the separate kingdoms of Israel (ten northern tribes), and Judah (southern kingdom consisting primarily of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi). A portion of the people of the northern kingdom at this time had already been taken into captivity by the Assyrians, and in a few years the Assyrians would take captive those who remained.

"And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel. For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at the regular time, because a sufficient number of priests **had not consecrated themselves**, nor had the people gathered together at Jerusalem. And the matter pleased the king and all the assembly. So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem, since they

had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner. Then the runners went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the king and his leaders, and spoke according to the command of the king: 'Children of Israel, return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then He will return to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation, as you see. Now do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord; and enter His sanctuary, which He has sanctified forever, and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you. For if you return to the Lord, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him.' So the runners passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun; but they **laughed at them and mocked them**. Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun **humbled themselves** and came to Jerusalem. Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders, at the word of the Lord. Now many people, a very great assembly, gathered at Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month" (II Chronicles 30:1-13).

We find that at the time of Jesus, "And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem **before the Passover, to purify themselves**" (John 11:55).

However, because of the circumstances, many of the people who participated in the Passover observance during Hezekiah's first year **had not been cleansed** through the usual means of purification under the Old Covenant. "For there were many in the assembly who had **not sanctified themselves**; therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover lambs for everyone who was not clean, to sanctify them to the Lord. For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had **not cleansed themselves**, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'May the good Lord provide atonement for everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.' And the Lord listened to Hezekiah and healed the people [meaning in this context that he forgave them, or accepted them as sanctified]" (II Chronicles 30:17-20).

What these Scriptures reveal is the **significance of sanctification, holiness, spiritual purification, in order to have the kind of relationship with God that he wants us to have**. Sanctification is defined in the 1913 *Webster's Dictionary* as, "The act of sanctifying or making holy; the state of being sanctified or made holy; esp. (Theol.), the act of God's grace by which the affections of men are purified, or alienated from sin and the world, and exalted to a supreme love to God; also, the state of being thus purified or sanctified."

Sanctification under the Old Covenant was accomplished by **washings and sacrifices**. For example, regarding corpse uncleanness the law of the Old Covenant states the following: "He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall **purify himself** with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. **Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the**

tabernacle of the Lord. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness is still on him. This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, is unclean. Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. And for an **unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave. The clean person shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.** But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the Lord. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean" (Numbers 19:11-20).

In the case of the uncleanness resulting from the flow of blood associated with childbirth, a woman who gave birth was required to offer a sacrifice in order to be cleansed. "When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then he shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who has borne a male or a female. And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons--one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean" (Leviticus 12:6-8).

Similar laws applied to other circumstances that resulted in impurity under the ritual laws of the Old Covenant. So to partake of the Passover the requirements for Levitical cleanliness, or purification, had to be met, whatever might have been the cause for ritual uncleanness.

These laws were given as object lessons, not so much for the cleansing of the flesh, but of the Spirit. **They were given that we might learn from them the importance of spiritual sanctification, or purity of heart and mind.**

"It was **symbolic** for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience -- concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances **imposed until the time of reformation.** But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. **For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"** (Hebrews 9:9-14).

The Greek word translated "conscience" in verses 9 and 14 is συνείδησις (*suneidesis*). It means "moral consciousness" (*Strong's*). The Greek word συνείδησις is derived from the word συνείδω (*suneido*), which means to see completely, to understand, become aware, to be conscious or informed of (*Strong's*).

What is important to God, and what the Old Covenant rituals we have discussed point to, is **purification of our minds, the rectitude of our moral consciousness. It has to do with purity of mind, and a proper understanding of right and wrong along with a devotion to doing what is good in God's sight.**

So how is it that our minds are cleansed of spiritual defilement? One element we just read about in spiritual purification is **forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ, who gave his life as a sacrifice to cleanse us from the guilt of sin.** The other elements, all of which are essential to spiritual purity, are found mentioned in many Scriptures. One such Scripture is the following: "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through **sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth**" (II Thessalonians 2:13).

God's purpose, not just for some but for all mankind from the beginning is to have salvation, but salvation requires cleansing, being made holy, pure, through a process of sanctification by: (1) Coming to understand and believe the truth; (2) having our sins forgiven through Christ's sacrifice; (3) receiving and being motivated, guided and empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

Spiritual purification involves **obedience to God**, which comes with **knowing what is sin, confessing your sins, and resolving to put them out of your life, to overcome them, with God's help.**

By God's word comes the knowledge of right and wrong, what is righteousness and what is sin. Paul wrote to Timothy: "But you must continue in the things which you **have learned and been assured of**, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the **Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.** All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:14-17).

The Scriptures inform and enlighten our conscience, our minds. Jesus said, in a prayer to the Father, speaking of his disciples, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). He said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

God knows the truth. And he wants us to know the truth. God knows what sin is, because he's the one who, as the Eternal Creator, the all wise God, **defines sin and righteousness through his laws.** "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4).

"Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us" (Deuteronomy 6:25). "My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness" (Psalms 119:172). "Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea" (Isaiah 48:18).

So the standard of truth is the Word of God, and the definition of sin and righteousness is contained in his commandments, properly understood and applied. Breaking God's commandments is sin. Obeying God's commandments is righteousness.

With that understanding then, we have a proper basis or standard by which we can examine ourselves. Now **God examines us constantly**. Speaking of God, Scripture says, "For His eyes are on the ways of man, And He sees all his steps" (Job 34:21). "For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes" (Jeremiah 16:17). "You are great in counsel and mighty in work, for your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 32:19). "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

God knows us perfectly. There is nothing hidden from God. The question for us is, do we know ourselves? We should want to know how God looks at us, because that's the basis on which we are judged, by how he sees us.

A psalmist wrote, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart" (Psalms 26:2). Implied in this prayer is a desire for God not only to examine the supplicant, but to reveal to him what God knows as he is tested. This is expressed in another Scripture: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And **lead me in the way everlasting**" (Psalms 139:23-24).

David wrote: "O Lord, **You have searched me and known me**. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me,' Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You. For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest

parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" (Psalms 139:1-17)

Verse sixteen in the New King James, as in some other versions, is poorly translated. "And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them." This might lead one to believe, as some have falsely claimed, that God has mapped out your life beforehand, and everything you do was according to a preordained plan, and you have no real control over your decisions or the outcome of your life. That idea is a lie, and is contrary to the plain truth of God's word, that he has made us free moral agents with the power to make choices, and the certainty that we will be judged by the choices we make (cf. Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

A better translation is the King James Version: "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalms 139:16, KJV).

Two other similar translations are:

"Thine eyes did see my unformed substance, and in thy book all my members were written; during many days were they fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalms 139:16, Darby).

"Thy eyes saw my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all [my members] were written, [which] in continuance were fashioned, when [as yet there was] none of them" (Psalms 139:16, Webster).

Adam Clarke's commentary explains the verse as follows: "All those members lay open before God's eyes; they were discerned by him as clearly as if the *plan* of them had been *drawn in a book*, even to the least figuration of the body of the child in the womb."

The idea is that as a child develops in the womb it is according to a plan, as though written in a book. And indeed we know that the pattern for the development of the child is there in the first cells joined together at the very moment of conception. Books, literally, are now being coded and stored in artificially synthesized DNA, which can store an enormous volume of information in a very small amount of space.

There are various ways of calculating the storage capacity of DNA, but the human genome, a copy of which is in every cell, can store an amount of data at least equal to more than 800 *Britannica* size encyclopedia volumes. However, information in a human cell is not only contained in the DNA, but also in RNA, proteins, and the cell structure itself. Concerning all the activity in a living human being, involving the genome, science writer Yevgeniy Grigoryev states, "I think it would be virtually impossible to calculate the data actually expressed at any moment, taking into account any all [sic] the possible promoter states and epigenetic events" ("How Much Information is Stored in the Human Genome?," Yevgeniy Grigoryev, comments section, unlimitedcomputing.no, March 16, 2012).

The point of the Psalm is that God knows us intimately, far better than we know ourselves.

God wants us to examine ourselves by the standard of truth, which is his word. Paul, in the context of the Passover, wrote the following instructions: "But **let a man examine himself**, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For **if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged**. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world" (I Corinthians 11:29-32).

We are warned in Scripture about thinking too highly of ourselves, which is what humans naturally tend to do quite often. On the other hand, some have an inferiority complex, or an unhealthy kind of self-loathing, which is destructive.

We need to understand that our nature is inherently corrupt, and we must fight it constantly. "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

We should examine ourselves honestly, knowing there will be flaws in our character. "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. For each one shall bear his own load" (Galatians 6:1-5).

We are to strive to live in such a way as to, when possible, help those who are sinning, realizing we're all subject to temptation. This takes a degree of discernment and judgment, because effectively helping someone who is overtaken with sin requires that they want to be helped, and are willing to cooperate in helping themselves. But if a person in such a state is willing, he who is able and in a position to do so should bear the burden of helping to restore the person.

Then the Scripture goes on to say, "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. For each one shall bear his own load" (Galatians 6:3-5).

We can be deceived about ourselves, and how we measure up spiritually. "Also He [Jesus] spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you,

this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14).

We should not compare ourselves with others. Paul wrote, "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (II Corinthians 10:12). The standard for us is Jesus Christ. "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: **Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth**" (I Peter 2:21-22).

How do we measure up to his standard of righteousness? If we can see that we are not perfect, and have a long way to go toward perfection, but that we are striving to overcome, then we can rejoice in that, with an awareness of our need for further effort and progress.

Paul wrote that he sought "... the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. **Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected**; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, **I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus**. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you" (Philippians 3:9-15).

We are admonished: "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" (II Corinthians 13:5).

In Lamentations, writing of a people being punished for their sins in a national calamity, Jeremiah wrote: "**Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the Lord**" (Lamentations 3:40). Our nations today are headed for just such a calamity. Each of us needs to make sure that we, as individuals, are not part of the problem.

If we keep our eyes focused on the goal of God's Kingdom, and on Christ our Savior and High Priest who intercedes with the Father for us, we can be assured that as our faults become known to us, and we seek to correct them with God's help, that he will deliver us in the end.

"Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard, Who keeps our soul among the living, And does not allow our feet to be moved. For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water; But You brought us out to rich fulfillment" (Psalms 66:8-12).

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