

Word-Centered Examination Leads to Spirit-Filled Assurance

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by David Schrock

Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. -- Psalm 19:12-14 --

The Lord's Table presumes that sinners will come and feast at a banqueting table of grace. There are none who approach the Table without sin, but neither are there any who rightly assess their sin. Therefore, we need to ask like David did: "Who can discern his errors?" And in turn, let God speak to us *through his Word* to find the answer.

David's question is an honest acknowledgement we who need to examine ourselves are bereft of the tools to do it. Fortunately, God has spoken light into our darkness. In the rest of Psalm 19, we find God speaking in his world (vv. 1--6) and his Word (vv. 7--11). While God's inaudible voice can be heard through the creation we see, it is the Law of God---the *Torah*---which is designed to expose our wretchedness and lead us to our Redeemer (v. 14).

Using Psalm 19 as a Means of Spiritual Introspection

At the heart of Psalm 19, we find 6 lines praising God's variegated word (vv. 7--9). By taking the reverse of God's perfections, we can ask a handful of questions that help us prepare for communion. (I include a handful of other verses that amplify the truth of each verse).

- **7a:** What idols are stealing my joy? What part of creation (i.e., a person, a thing, a hobby, etc.) do I need to release or revalue?

⁷*For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the Lord will answer him myself. ⁸And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the Lord. (Ezekiel 14:7-8)*

- **7b:** What patterns of foolishness do I continue to pursue?

¹²*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. (Proverbs 14:12)*

- **8a:** What joylessness do I need to confess?

⁴⁷*Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, (Deuteronomy 28:47)*

- **8b:** What darkness do I need to evade? What truth am I choosing to suppress?

¹⁸*They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. (Ephesians 4:18)*

- **9a:** What spiritual discipline have I neglected? What distraction has prevented me from personal devotion to the Lord?

³*But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)*

- **9b:** What command am I willfully ignoring or breaking? What sin do I need to relinquish?

¹⁷*So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. (James 4:17)*

Ask the Spirit to use these questions to search your heart (Psalm 139:23--24). Trust him, that he will bring to mind those attitudes and actions you need to confess. This is what Jesus said the Spirit would do (John 16:8). It is not incumbent on us to reveal sin (see Philippians 3:15), but to repent of it when it is revealed.

At the same time, let this light drive you to a renewed sense of awe at God's mercy. It is through the repeated process of conviction and cleansing that God's sanctifies us. And even more, as Psalm 19 says, God's Word revives, makes wise, gladdens, enlightens, strengthens, and straightens (justifies) those who are weary, foolish, joyless, blind, deceived, and sinful. In other words, the purpose of examination is never, NEVER condemnation, but cleansing that brings us closer to God---the source of our greatest joy (Psalm 16:11).

For this reason, the call to examine ourselves should not be perceived as a religious drudgery--something like having a monthly root canal. Just the reverse. Paul's invitation to examine ourselves moves us past the uncertainty which plagues us---"who can discern his errors?"---to the steadfast assurance that God loves us and sent Jesus to bring us into his family.

The Call to Examine Yourself is a Gateway to Assurance

Christ died to assure our hearts of God's love. But that assurance comes by confronting sin, not covering it over. We take the Lord's Supper to remember Christ's atoning death, which necessitates a sober reflection upon our sin.

Wonderfully, we don't have to wonder if our words are made acceptable before God. If we examine ourselves with the Word and confess sin as the Spirit convicts, we can rest in this promise: "He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleanse us of all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

As we approach the Lord's Table this Sunday, take time to read Psalm 19 and the questions listed above. Use them as a means of examining your heart, confessing your sin, thanking God for the forgiveness that comes through Christ, and preparing to partake of the bread and cup.

For His Glory and your joy, Pastor David