

HOW DOES ONE SPIRITUALLY EXAMINE HIMSELF BEFORE COMMUNION?

1 Corinthians 11:28

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It seems that everything in a fallen world needs maintenance: our homes, our furnaces, our a/c units, our washers and dryers, our cars, and on and on it goes. The Apostle Paul teaches us that our souls are also very much in need of care and maintenance in 1 Corinthians 11:28.

There are three questions concerning the notion of examining oneself that we will reflect on this evening.

1. Who should examine himself?

There are three contextual layers that lead us to an answer to this question.

- A. The first contextual layer of the letter reveals that this was written to the church at Corinth. Paul was writing to believers.
- B. The second contextual layer of the chapter reveals that this was written to believers engaged in corporate worship activity. In particular activity related to the Lord's Supper.
- C. The third contextual layer of the verse reveals this refers to any believer who intends to participate in the Lord's Supper.

2. When should a person examine himself?

It's assumed that this takes place before participating in the Lord's Supper. Our soul's condition needs to be discerned before partaking of the elements.

3. How should one examine himself before communion?

The word translated "examine" is from a Greek word (δοκιμάζω/*dokimazō*). This word has to do with testing metals. The word means, "to make a critical examination of something to determine genuineness, put to the test, examine" (BDAG, 255-6). We took Julie's wedding ring to a jeweler to get the setting repaired. The jeweler has you look at the diamond under a high-powered scope to observe its "fingerprint" so that you can determine the genuineness of the stone we get back. There is a solemnity to this notion of examination in this context because we are dealing with sin, the cancer of the soul. There is also a rigor to this because we need to thoroughly examine ourselves. It's like mining. So here are five practical ways for one to spiritually examine himself before Communion.

- A. Plan to spend some time alone preparing yourself.
Notice the text says, let a person examine *himself* (ἑαυτὸν). The elements do not give you the grace to examine yourself; it needs to be done ahead of time.
- B. Plan to spend some time in the Word prior to Communion. The passages best suited for such an occasion are those related to the suffering and death of our Lord.
- C. Plan to spend some time in prayerful and thoughtful introspection in the spirit of Psalm 139:23-24.
Acknowledge the sins you struggle with and you've committed up to that moment.
- D. Plan to spend time in penitent confession of sins. This requires identifying sins as well as repenting of and confessing sins (Psalm 32:5; 51:1-5; 1 John 1:9). Acknowledging sin is not the same as repentance and confession anymore than acknowledging you're in pain is itself a step toward taking steps to tend to the wound. Sometimes this takes some additional work, reconciling with someone or taking steps to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).
- E. Plan to accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9). This leads to a restoration of the fellowship that we are so privileged to share with God. Remember what God has done for you and that you are worthy to receive these benefits only because of what Christ has done for you (Romans 5:1).

What if you have not done this? You may be guilty of a grave sin, what Paul calls eating and drinking "in an unworthy manner." If your soul is not ready to partake of communion, let the bread and the fruit of the vine pass. Don't partake. You may save face before your brothers and sisters in Christ; but you have not fooled God. And it is He who will deal with you. This table is not for perfect people for then not one could sit at table. This table is for penitent sinners.

So as you can see, the care of our souls is of first importance. Moreover, the primacy of the Lord's Supper becomes obvious. Though the occasion of Communion should not be the only time that we engage in introspection, confession, and repentance, it is a time that affords that opportunity that may be lost throughout the course of our week.

But examine first our case, Whether you be in the faith;
Do you long for pardoning grace? Is your only hope His death?
Then, howe'er your soul's oppressed, Come you are a worthy guest
(John Hus, "To Avert From Men God's Wrath," 1410)