

Practical Religion
LESSON ONE: SELF-INQUIRY

And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are” (Acts 15:36).

- I. The Need of Self-Inquiry
 - a. Spiritual Privileges (2 Ki. 7:19)
 - i. Relative to the world
 - ii. Relative to broader Christianity
 - b. Spiritual Dangers
 - i. Mere outward profession
 - ii. Unestablished believers
 - c. The Need of a Plan for Self-Inquiry
 - i. “If I say things which at first sight look harsh or severe, believe me, he is your best friend who tells you the truth.” (Ryle)
- II. Questions for Self-Examination
 - a. *Do we ever think about our souls at all?* (Is. 1:3; Hg. 1:7; Dt. 32:29)
 - i. What occupies our thoughts?
 - ii. Do we merely tolerate religion? (*cf.* Gn. 25:27-34; Hb. 12:15-17)
 - iii. Do we ignore divine interruptions?
 - b. *Do we ever do anything about our souls?* (Mt. 21:30; Ek. 33:31, 32)
 - i. Does our thinking of our souls lead to action?
 - ii. Is there any attempt to separate ourselves from service to the world?
 - iii. Is there any real attempt to take up the cross and follow Christ?
 - c. *Are we trying to satisfy our consciences with a mere formal religion?* (Mt. 15:9)
 - i. “They are not satisfied. Beginning at the wrong end, by making outward things first, they know nothing of inward joy and peace, and pass their lives in a constant struggle, secretly conscious that there is something wrong, and yet not knowing why.” (Ryle)
 - ii. “Means of grace and forms of religion are useful in their way, and God seldom does anything for his church without them. But let us beware of making shipwreck on the very lighthouse which helps to show the channel into the harbor.” (Ryle)
 - d. *Have we received forgiveness of our sins?* (Jn. 3:36)
 - i. We all must confess we are sinners—we need forgiveness.
 - ii. Christ provides that forgiveness—full, free, perfect, eternal, and complete.
 - iii. This forgiveness is not ours automatically upon joining a church, or being born into it, or by virtue of finishing a catechism.
 - iv. Without personal belief, there is no personal forgiveness.

- e. *Do we know anything by experience of conversion to God?* (Ro. 8:9; 2 Co. 5:17)
 - i. Without conversion, there is no salvation (Jn. 3:3).
 - ii. Conversion that is *had* will also be *seen*.
- f. *Do we know anything of practical Christian holiness?* (Hb. 12:14)
 - i. Holiness through personal exertion, imperfection, struggle. (1 Co. 9:27).
 - ii. “*Seen more than heard.*”
- g. *Do we know any enjoyment of his means of grace?*
 - i. Is it for love’s sake that I am content only to read ahead so many chapters?
 - ii. Am I ready to meet Christ, even though I never pour out my soul to him as my Friend, uttering rehearsed words morning and evening, or at meals?
 - iii. Will I truly be happy I heaven if I find Sunday so dull and boring?
 - iv. Is my worship metered by those around me or my affections toward God, or do I care anything about whether there is truth or error in the sermon?
 - v. Does my heart never burn within me when I receive the bread and wine, especially given to remind me of Christ’s atoning death on the cross?
- h. *Do we ever try to do good in the world?* (Ac. 10:38; Lk. 10:37)
 - i. Are we content to go to heaven but care not what becomes of others?
 - ii. Are we concerned only for ourselves and our own families? (Mt. 5:46-47).
 - iii. We all—each one—have something to give.
- i. *Do we live in habitual communion with Christ?* (Jn. 15:4-8; Ga. 2:20; Ph. 1:21)
 - i. Union and communion are distinct; union is the bud, communion the flower. There is no communion without union first; there are many unhappily united to Christ with little to no communion at all.
 - ii. Communion is marked by *striving* to grow in grace, faith, knowledge, and conformity to Christ in all things.
 - iii. Communion is the secret of abiding joy and peace in believing (Ro. 8:37).
- j. *Are we ready for Christ’s coming?* (Lk. 17:32; 21:34; Ac. 1:11)
 - i. Do we look *backward* to the cross, rejoicing in Christ crucified?
 - ii. Do we look *upward* to the risen Christ at the right hand of the Father, rejoicing in Christ’s intercession?
 - iii. Do we look *forward* to Christ’s promised return, rejoicing to see him?

III. Questions for Personal Application

- a. Are you asleep and thoughtless about religion? (Jn. 1:6; Ep. 5:14).
- b. Are you feeling self-condemned, afraid there’s no hope for your soul? (Mt. 11:28; Mk. 10:49; Lk. 15:2; Jn. 6:37; 7:37).
- c. Are you a professing believer with little joy, peace, and comfort? (1 Jn. 1:4, 7).
- d. Are you a believer oppressed with doubts and fears due to your own feebleness of faith, spiritual infirmity, or sense of sin? (Mt. 12:20).
- e. Are you sometimes downcast by the trials you meet on the way to heaven, trials of the body, of family, of circumstance, of the world? (Pr. 23:18; Hb. 36-37).