

LOOK AT YOURSELF

Romans 12:14-21

Life is a grindstone and whether it grinds you down or polishes you up depends on the material of which you are made. In this service, let us look at ourselves, not as others see us, but as we really are. We have a way of decrying the woes of the world, the troubles of society, the sins of the human race. Much of the trouble is with us, as Shakespeare reminded us in the statement, "Brutus, the trouble is not in our stars, but in ourselves."

In talking about his wild impulses, Carl Sandburg exclaimed, "I think I have a whole menagerie under my ribs," by which he meant, his inner life acted like a whole group of wild animals, screaming and crying out for expression. This is just another novel way of saying that the inner makeup of nature is often a mysterious and awful anatomy needing to be understood more than anything.

As you look at yourself you may be inclined to dislike what you see, or what you feel. Others of you may be inclined to like all that you see, or all that you feel. In this message I want to point out some possible courses of action that are open to all of us when we look at ourselves under close scrutiny.

I. You Can Defy Yourself.

Falling so far short of what they would like to be or say or do, there is a type of resistance that follows which robs life of much of its meaningfulness. It is not difficult to find many people who are at civil war with themselves.

Having discovered some of the weak spots in their personalities, instead of setting themselves to the task of correction and strengthening, they aggravate the weakness, pick at the sore spots, and set up a battery of defiant resistance. Little wonder that this self-battling prevents one from accepting himself as he is. If he is not battling himself, he usually is at war with other people. Such a person seldom knows a minute of real happiness or joy.

For such a person life is lived between boxes of pills, another drink, or another interview or lecture. Pretty soon the person is victimized by a rat race of obsessions, running from one witch doctor to another as though this exhaustive effort would result in some sort of cure. The folly is accentuated by changing jobs, or moving from one community to another, or divorcing the life's partner, whereas the real trouble in most cases is neither in the job nor in the partner, but in self. This is defiance. Fighting ourselves instead of accepting ourselves as we are, and then setting our energies in the direction of self-improvement.

Defiance is usually characterized by belligerence, or a war-like attitude. This kind of person never likes anything he hears or sees, if spoken or done by others. With his fists doubled up toward every situation, he fails to understand, while suspecting the motives of all others.

Many times this ugly attitude and process started in extreme youth perhaps in the cradle. It may have started with defiance about the milk bottle, or with the mother's palm that stung the child out of a temper tantrum. Through the growing years of the child one thing added to another until in maturity there is the scowling defiance of the baby-man who never grew up.

Such a person ignores the words of Christ in Matthew 7:1-3: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye be judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" Any person who has a critical and censorious spirit does so for one of the following reasons:

1. Indolence.

Criticism is so easy. A person does not have to possess intelligence, character or Christianity to criticize. A person who is too indolent and lazy to do things that are constructive and worthwhile, and which he ought to do, as Christ has commanded, soon finds himself meddling in the affairs of others. Any Christian who is doing his duty is entirely too busy to be looking for the faults of others.

2. Jealousy.

If you are pleased when you hear something unpleasant about another, that is due to jealousy. This spirit always leads to criticism and censoriousness, and neither of them pleases the Lord.

3. Self-righteousness.

A self-righteous person has a feeling of superiority and a spirit of self-satisfaction. He usually expresses himself readily and censoriously.

4. Hypocrisy.

In proportion as one is quick to discern the faults of others, he becomes less aware of his own shortcomings. The personal sin of a critical person may be as huge as a beam; yet, he is not able to see it because he is so busy hunting for the speck of dust in his brother's eye.

Whether it is indolence, jealousy, self-righteousness, or hypocrisy that causes you to find fault with others, the sin of doing so is unnecessary, unavailing, and unprofitable in any life, and is especially unbecoming in any Christian. No one ever gets right with God or pleases Him, or becomes a better person, or maintains his influence by confessing what he considers the weakness or sins of his fellowman. Regardless of what he may think about it, the person who finds fault with and criticizes somebody else disobeys God, dishonors Christ, lowers himself in the estimation of others, lessens his own personal influence, and contributes to his own wretchedness. Intelligent people, whether they are Christians or not, do not have any desire to live on that level.

II. You can Despise Yourself.

A second course of action that is open to you when you look at yourself with an honest vision is to despise yourself. While defiance set up a kind of civil war inside, this attitude of despising yourself can cut the foundation from under you. The person who is guilty of this seldom has the nerve or courage to take his own life, but he does something worse, he slowly takes the joy out of living for many other people. This self-despiser fancies himself as the "picked-on" member of society, the one who never got the breaks, or what was coming to him by the way of his rightful due. Though not

taking his life outright, he insists on warping, twisting and perverting it.

Far too many people are too much preoccupied with themselves. They brood over their mistakes and failures, their defects and infirmities, all the while becoming more and more morally weak and craven, destroying their peace of mind and strength of spirit, dissipating their strength, which if used to help others would bring greater peace to themselves.

In the early days of his career Martin Luther was constantly fingering his moral and spiritual pulse. In his diary he wrote, "I fight with the devil every night until my body is covered with perspiration." He became a wiser man when a friend faced him with himself and said, "You poor fool, God isn't angry with you; you are angry with God."

Such morbid preoccupation with oneself is unhealthy and unChristian. You can keep a watch on yourself without always having your finger on your pulse. God gave you a heart, not that you may spend your time listening to see how it is beating, but to keep it beating for something better and more important than yourself. Everything we have God gave to us to use to carry us out of and away from ourselves. What life means to you is determined by the attitude you take toward it. Living is at least ninety per cent attitude. Your life can be transformed by the renewing of your mind, or by the changing of your attitude.

In order to have and maintain a balanced attitude toward life, you must balance the good with the bad, with your eye fixed on the average. Do you have a sense of perspective, an internal balanced attitude toward life, the ability to take the long look? Are you in the habit of balancing the good with the bad, discovering the average, and keeping your attention upon that and never upon your greatest gains or your greatest losses? A balanced attitude toward life depends upon keeping your eyes fixed, not upon just the best or just the worst, but on the average somewhere between the good and the bad.

Bruce Barton told about a young man who set out in life to sell cash registers. He made up his mind that if he could sell them to Marshall Field in Chicago he would have a great inning and the example of that great concern would have tremendous influence upon smaller merchants in his territory. The first time he called upon Marshall Field he did not receive an order or any encouragement. He called upon him the next year and the next and the next until finally in the tenth year he came away with an order for \$150,000. That young man, possessing a balanced attitude toward life, looked back over the years and said to himself, "Fifteen thousand for each year is not a bad average after all."

Life has a way of balancing itself for you. Life delivers at your doorstep both the best and the worst. Many have learned how to look back across the years, to weigh the good against the bad; and multitudes are grateful that their lives have averaged up so well. In consequence, they face the future with confidence, courage and faith.

If you expect all of your years to be equally good, you will be disappointed. You must expect to balance the good with the bad. If you will do so, it will save you much anguish and disappointment. A balanced attitude toward life is the right way of looking at life.

Look for a moment at those first disciples of Christ. At one point in their careers they were less than ordinary men. One betrayed the Lord Jesus; another denied Him; the rest forsook Him and fled. Finish the story and we will see eleven of those twelve men as daring, uncompromising, and fearing nothing except that they might be unworthy of Him Who gave them salvation and the only life that is worthwhile. At the end of it you see them going into exile, being thrown to the lions, being burned to death, being beheaded, or wasting away in prison. Take a long look at them from the memorable moment they answered the call of Him Who said, "Follow me," until their martyrdom and you may ask, "Where else in all the annals of history do you find twelve men who averaged up so well?"

You develop a balanced attitude toward life by taking a long look back. What seemed a failure to you yesterday has become with the passing of time a triumph. What at one moment seemed to be an irretrievable defeat turned out to be a success. What once looked to you like a great loss turned out to be a great gain. John Bunyan was within prison walls for twelve long years, yet out of that loss of freedom he wrote himself into immortal liberty in his Pilgrim's Progress. When you take the long look back across the years and centuries, you see that frequently history's greatest tragedies have turned out to be the world's greatest triumphs.

A balanced attitude toward life depends also upon your ability to take a long look around you, for then you discover that what life brings to you is as good as, if not far better than, what it has given to ninety-nine out of every hundred people. If you sigh to be in another's place, or to have what he has, if you think that life has been more unkind and unjust to you than it has been to other people, remember that your situation could have been or could be far worse than has been or is the case. Most of us can be extremely grateful today when we compare our lives with those of other people. When you balance what you have, and what you do not have, against what other people have, and do not have, you will be better content with your lot. Socrates was right when he said that if you would gather together all the troubles of all the people in the world, weigh them, and find the average, you would pick your lot. That is what Fanny J. Crosby did. She was stricken blind at the age of six, yet she developed a balanced attitude toward life by taking a long look around, so to speak. She discovered that, although she was blind, she had many things which other people did not have. Listen to her, as she said:

"O what a happy child I am
Although I cannot see!
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.

How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't;
To weep and sigh because I'm blind
I cannot and I won't."

You can develop and maintain a balanced attitude toward life by taking a long look ahead. When you do that, you inevitably view your present moment in a totally different perspective. The knowledge that in the past an apparent defeat has turned out to be a victory enables you to live in the hope that what happened yesterday can happen tomorrow. Then you live your present moment, whatever it may be, in the faith that it is filled with unforeseen and unforeseeable possibilities.

A balanced attitude toward life depends upon your ability to believe that it takes another world to finish what you have begun here. To a friend, shortly before his death, Isaac Pitman gave this message as to the secret of his unusually poised and peaceful life: "To those who ask how Isaac Pitman passed away, say, 'Peacefully, and with no more concern than in passing from one room to another to take up some further employment.'" You must look as far ahead as that to maintain a balanced attitude toward life in the present.

III. You Can Dedicate Yourself.

This is the only intelligent course of action for you. Do not defy yourself; do not despise yourself; but dedicate yourself, that is, take yourself as you are, apart from all wishful thinking, and deposit it at the feet of the Lord for His re-making and using. Say to yourself, "God has made me and while my decisions and choices may have warped, detoured, or derailed my life, He is able to take the broken parts and put me back together as He would have me."

Dedication has muscle in it, strength that takes hold and refuses to turn loose. Dedication is taking your life with all its bruises and burns, its brands and pains to the only source of relieving succor.

There are many things about you that you never can change, but the glorious thing is that God can. That is the business that God is in, erasing the leopard's spots, cleansing the leper's sores, and removing the pangs of venomous guilt. That is why we sing that old song of invitation, "Just As I Am." God will take you as you are, if you will present or dedicate yourself to Him, and make you what you ought to be.

God appeals to you saying, "Why defy or despise yourself when you can dedicate yourself and truly live?"