

Spring Cleaning
March 3, 2013

A Woman went to the Post Office to buy stamps for her Christmas cards.

"What Denomination?" asked the clerk.

"Oh, good heavens! Have we come to this?" said the woman. "Well give me 50 Baptist and 50 Catholic ones."

Ever wonder where the name Baptist came from? It was a nickname. You know what a nickname is. It is a name someone else calls you instead of using your regular name. Maybe a relative gives you a nickname. Sometimes friends or coworkers give you a nickname. Sometimes enemies give you a nickname.

Even Christians have a nickname. The nickname of Christians is... Christians. Originally Christianity was called "the Way". (Acts 9:2; 16:17; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22) But in one city those who opposed us called us little Christs, or Christians (Greek: *Christianos*). (Acts 11:26; 26:28)

The name stuck and we began to use it for ourselves. That's also what happened to those who became Baptists. In the early 1600's a group of Christians separated themselves from the other Christian groups of that time. In the year 1609 this group was meeting in the city of Amsterdam, in what is today the Netherlands. They rejected how the infant baptism of all the other groups. Instead, they came believe, by a careful study of the Bible that a person should first become a believer in Jesus, a follower of Jesus, and THEN be baptized. This meant that babies should not be baptized. And all the members of this group, though they had been baptized as infants, underwent baptism as adults. This emphasis on baptism led others to nickname them Baptists, and the name stuck.

Another group of Christians that got its name this way are Methodists. If you look carefully at that word you see the word "method" in it. When John Wesley and his brother Charles were attending Oxford University in England, they decided they were not taking seriously enough their relationship to Jesus. They wanted to be sure of serving Jesus every hour of every day. So they came up with a method of improvement. They started a club called the Holy Club. Member of the Holy Club set aside time for daily prayer, Bible reading, and self-examination. They met together each week to talk about how things were going. They also worked together in service to the poor and imprisoned. As part of their self-examination, they asked themselves a series of questions to look for signs of sin in themselves.

They were nicknamed "Methodist" by other students who made fun of them for their efforts at trying to become more dedicated to God. The group decided they liked the nickname and kept it.

John Wesley used a list of 22 questions in his daily self-examination, looking for signs of sin. I'm not going to read all of them to you. You can find them on the internet. Let me give you a few examples.

- Am I honest in all my actions and words, or do I exaggerate?
- Do I pass on what was told to me in confidence?
- Am I a slave to dress, friends, work, or habits?

- Do I give the Bible time to speak to me everyday?
- Am I enjoying prayer?
- When did I last speak to someone else about my faith?
- Do I pray about how to spend my money?

These are just some of the questions. They take some thought. They take some time. And they require some confession and repentance if you come up with the wrong answers.

This group prospered in their devotion to Jesus, and inspired others to join them. More groups were formed. And eventually it became a movement and later, a Christian denomination.

Over the centuries of Christian history others have made use of such a self-examination in order to be more devoted and obedient to Jesus. This is an idea right out of the Bible.

Lamentations 3:40 (NIV)

Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.

1 Corinthians 11:28 (NIV)

A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

1 Corinthians 11:31 (NIV)

But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.

This morning I want to help you learn to do this very thing. I hope you will make it a regular activity. Some of you may use one or more questions each day. Others may choose to do this in greater length weekly or monthly.

Undertaking such a process is necessary because sin begins in the heart. Jesus reminds us that sin always starts on the inside.

Mark 7:21-23 (NIV) *For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'*"

Not just these sins, but all sins start in the heart. Sin starts on the inside. We need God's help to see inside of our hearts. We don't have a window into our hearts. There is no app for your phone, tablet, or computer to discover the motives in your heart. But God can see clearly what is there. It takes conversation with God to examine ourselves and learn what sin is creeping into our hearts.

Now, if you aren't a Christian, we don't expect you to do this. But you might find the process helpful to other areas of your life. The process is sound. Many people, Christians and non-

Christians alike, have used such a process to help them improve their marriages, their businesses, and other life tasks. The process is sound no matter what you apply it to.

If you ARE a Christian and want to improve in your obedience to Jesus, I encourage you to give this a try in your devotion to Jesus. It works and will work for you. If you often feel dissatisfied in your obedience to Jesus, this will help you improve. Do you often end up needing to confess the same sins over and over because you aren't really doing anything differently to combat those sins? Here is something practical to do. Do you want to improve but haven't found a way to do so? Try this.

You can't improve by just wanting to. If we could improve by just wanting to, there wouldn't be a need for the Holy Spirit to be in us. But the truth is, improvement takes work on our part. And it takes us cooperating with the Holy Spirit.

So if you want to grow in your obedience to Jesus, if you want to be more fully living in His service, if you want to see real change take place in your character and holiness, then this is an important skill to develop.

Steps to Greater Obedience

1. Ask, and honestly answer, sin-seeking questions.

Where do you get such questions? Well, you can borrow someone else's questions, like those of John Wesley, or come up with your own.

Or you can use Bible passages to trigger questions to ask of yourself. I want to guide you in this process this morning. Let's read a passage together, from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 6:12-14 (NIV) *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

Now, based on that passage, and what it is speaking about, some questions you might ask yourself are these:

Is there anyone against whom I hold a grudge? Stop and think about specific individuals in your life. Is there one you are holding a grudge against? Is there one you have been avoiding? Is there one you resent for some reason?

**Is there anyone I haven't forgiven?
Is there anyone I hate?**

Are there any misunderstandings that I have been unwilling to forget?

**Is there any person against whom I am jealous of?
Is there anyone I dislike to hear praised or well spoken of?**

All of these questions are based on your wrong attitude towards someone else, an attitude that Jesus doesn't have towards you. Jesus could have such an attitude towards you. Because of your sins against Him, He would be justified in having such attitudes towards

you. But instead, He shows you grace and mercy. And He expects us, as His followers to do the same towards other people.

Again, if you aren't a Christian, this probably sounds like foolishness, and we certainly don't expect that you would choose to act this way. We choose to do because this is the way Jesus has acted towards us.

Let's try another example, this time from one of Paul's letters.

1 Corinthians 4:2 (NIV) *Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*

This speaks of responsibilities, obligations, and commitments we have towards others in any area. It may be work, school, home, etc. Ask yourself the following.

Am I being slack in my responsibilities and/or obligations to my Lord, my spouse, my children, my parents, my friends, my neighbors, my church, or my employer?

Think about each separately. What is expected of you in that context or relationship? Are you meeting your responsibilities, obligations, or commitments?

2. When you discover what is in your heart, admit it to yourself.

You first need to admit to yourself that this is a real sin in you. Some people can't even take that first step.

There is a popular TV show with a young man who is extremely intelligent, though socially awkward, who speaks of himself as never making mistakes. I realize they overemphasize that trait on TV for the laughs it brings, but some people in real life have a hard time admitting even to themselves that they are flawed. Their self-concept is wrapped up in pretending to be perfect, pretending even to themselves. They can't handle the truth about themselves, so they never work to correct their flaws. They never admit to being sinners and coming to Jesus for salvation.

We who once admitted our sinfulness to God, must continue to deal with sins that are hiding in our hearts. So when you discover sin in you, don't ignore it, don't pretend it isn't real. Admit that it is true.

3. When you discover what is in your heart, confess it to God.

Don't pretend you can deal with sin on your own. You can't. Many try, because they want to be proud about what they accomplish for Jesus. The truth is, apart from Jesus you can do nothing. So admit your sin to yourself and then confess that sin to God. You will find God faithful, in Christ, to forgive.

1 John 1:9 (NIV) *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (Proverbs 28:13)*

Confessing your sin to God is an important step. It serves to keep you humble before God and promotes worship. It keeps the focus on Jesus, where it should be.

4. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower the changes you will make today in your attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions.

When you first became a follower of Jesus you admitted your sin and made a commitment to repent, to change, to turn away from sinful ways. Repentance must continue. Every time you become aware of sin in your life, you must repent of it.

The Holy Spirit is in you to empower that process. But you must seek His work, yield to His work, cooperate with His work. Like confessing your sin to God, this keeps the focus correct. It keeps you humble as you live what Jesus said, "Without me you can do nothing."

I encourage you to work this process of self-examination and grow in your devotion to Jesus. Grow in your obedience to Jesus. Grow in your becoming like Jesus.

As we grow older the need for examining ourselves physically becomes more and more important. We check ourselves for lumps so we can detect some cancers early. In the same way it is also wise to do a spiritual self-exam to detect dangerous habits of sin that may be developing in us. Such habits can grow and spread just like a cancer, affecting all areas of our lives.

Make self-examination a regular part of your life with God. See God use this to make you stronger in faith, more enduring in hope, and more faithful in loving others. Others will see the character changes that take place in you, and will be drawn to Jesus.

(Invitation)

Our church gives away pens with our church name on them. There is no cost to the people we give them to. They are free. However, we choose who give them to. I mean there is no law in the universe that says we have to give anybody a pen. We freely choose to do so, and we get to decide who we give them to.

But while we give them free to people, they cost the church. The church has to buy them. Pens aren't free. Pens cost. They just don't cost those we give them to. To them, they are free.

Heaven is free. God gives heaven to those He wishes to give it to. And while heaven doesn't cost us anything, it wasn't free to God. God had to purchase our entrance into heaven. He did so with the life of His Son, Jesus. That is why Jesus died on the cross, to purchase our entrance into heaven, in a manner of speaking.

The only way we can enter heaven is if our sins are forgiven. But there is a penalty for sin. Jesus paid that penalty for us when He died on the cross.

Just as you must personally accept one of these pens from us in order to have one, so you must personally receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord in order for your sins to be forgiven and inherit eternal life. I urge you to do so today.