

"Mirror, Mirror"

by L. A. Stauffer

Some one has said that there are three views of a man: how he sees himself, how others see him, and how God sees him. The most accurate picture of any person, of course, is the one God, the omniscient one, sees. Until any man sees himself the way God does he will always be deceived — and self-deception is the most difficult illusion to fathom.

This is a problem for Christians as surely as it is for carnal men of the world. They rationalize their conduct, make excuses for their actions, and ignore sinful behavior almost as readily as servants of the devil under the bandage of sin. Pride, evil lusts, and spiritual blindness all contribute to this common malady among the saints.

The apostle Paul recognized this after writing two letters to the brethren at Corinth. He indicted them for moral problems, carnal attitudes, doctrinal error, and unbrotherly attitudes — then wrote: "Examine yourselves, as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves..." (2 Cor. 13:5, NKJV). Examine denotes "trying" or "testing" a matter and test means determining the genuineness of a thing.

That is demanded of metals, precious stones, pearls, and other valuable commodities. But, as here, it is also required of God's people. The American Standard Versions says "prove your own selves" — a call to decide if you are in Christ Jesus or are "reprobate," a word meaning "fit to be cast away" like garbage or worthless junk. Even Paul had concerns about keeping himself in subjection to the Lord lest after preaching to others he himself might be reprobate, "castaway," "rejected," "disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27, KJV, ASV, NASB).

To avoid self-deception and eternal rejection we must with good and honest hearts allow the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ to shine into our hearts and enlighten us with all spiritual wisdom and knowledge (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 1:15-18). That will disperse the darkness that blinds so many among us. That's the point that James makes about God's word as a mirror.

"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). James in the context is discussing a man who beholds "his natural face in a mirror" then walks away and forget and ignores "what manner of man he was" (vs. 23-24).

The point is clear. Men and women look into mirrors to see "true" reflections of their person appearance. Does the hair need combed? Is the make-up just right? Does the ties need straightened? Are the earrings positioned properly? How much sense does it make to see needs for change and forget or ignore them? And how much more serious is this when our spiritual person is under scrutiny.

The thought is that disciples must read the word of God objectively with thought of their inward needs. When they read of gossip, do they envision some other brother or sister and ignore themselves? Does the word "modesty" bring to mind their own apparel and the attention it draws to their body rather than to their own person? What about covetousness, indifference, ill-will, mindless worship, factionalism, lasciviousness (movies, TV), etc? Do we recognize these sins in ourselves?

I'm so reminded of David. Lust, adultery, deception, murder, and yet he could not see himself as God saw him. When Nathan told him the story of the rich man with lambs aplenty who took the poor man's pet ewe to be hospitable to a wayfaring man, David saw plainly the sin of such a debauched creature. Not, though, until he prophet from God spoke plainly, "Thou art the man." did David see himself the way God did (2 Sam. 12:1-15).

And this, brethren, is a serious problem among us. Few are excluded. God's word is designed to "teach" us. To "reprove" us, to "correct" us, and to "train" or discipline us in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). It is full of life "living" — and energy — "activity" — and is sharper than any sword whet by men. As a sword it will pierce deep into our souls, into our spirits, into our innermost being and "discern" our thoughts and intentions (Heb. 4:12).

The word "discern" is from a Greek word that yields our English words "critic" or "critique." God's words when they penetrate to the depths of our person are critical of what they find there that is amiss. As an English teacher with a red pencil critiques the grammar, the sentence structure, the organization, the syntax of a theme paper, so the word of God sees the flaws in our minds and character. But are we open to the instruction and changes that God lays on our hearts when we read, meditate, and pray over the truths He has revealed?

If we seek God's blessings in the works we seek to perform and the service we render in His kingdom, we must look into His perfect law and be mindful hearers who do what His perfect law demands. Self-examination is essential to the proof of whether we are real, true, and genuine. We must test ourselves by God's word before God Himself puts us on trial before the judgment throne of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).