

WHAT I THINK OF ME AND WHAT GOD THINKS OF ME

taken from

Proverbs 16:2



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Proverbs 16:2, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits."

"All the ways of man."

There is never in man the consciousness of having done anything wrong, and of course there is. Our text is a simple broad statement of what we all know to be true - that we have a strange power of blinding ourselves as to what is wrong within ourselves and in our actions.

Part of the cure for that lies in the thoughts of the second clause of our verse, "But the Lord weigheth the spirits."

He weighs them in a balance, or as a man might take up something and poise it in his hand, moving his hand up and down till his muscles, by their resistance, give him some inkling of the weight.

But what it is that God weighs? "The spirits." We too often content ourselves with looking at our ways. But God looks at our inner selves. He takes the inner man into account, He estimates the actions by the motives. And they often differ from our judgment of ourselves and of one another.

Now that is as far as our verse carries us. As a rule we have to keep ourselves within the limits of each verse in reading this book of Proverbs. For two adjoining verses have very seldom anything to do with each other.

But for the present case they have. For here is what follows: "Commit thy works unto the Lord. And thy thoughts (about yourself and anything else) shall be established." That is to say since we make such terrible blunders about the moral character of our own works, and since side by side with these erroneous estimates there is God's absolutely correct and all penetrating one, common sense says, put yourself into His hands, and then it will be all right.

So we consider now these well-worn and familiar thoughts as to our strange blunders about ourselves, as to the contemporaneous Divine estimate, which is absolutely correct, and as to the practical issues that come from two facts.

First, our strange power of blinding ourselves. It is difficult to make a familiar principle impressive. But we would only apply this principle to ourselves, that "All the ways of a man," that is me, "are right in his own eyes." That means that my eyes, and if we apply that directly to our own personal experience and thoughts of ourselves, we will find that, like every other familiar principle of morality and Christianity, the apparently toothless generality has sharp enough teeth, and that the trite truth flashes up into strange beauty, and has power, to purify and guide our lives.

Some say that they recognize truths bedridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with exploded errors, and that is true of this thought, that we cannot truly estimate ourselves.

"All the ways of man are right in his own eyes." To begin with, we all know that there is nothing that we so habitually neglect as the bringing of conscience to bear right through our lives. Sometimes it is because there is a temptation that appeals very strongly, perhaps to sense, perhaps to some strong inclination which has been strengthened by indulgence. And when the craving arises there is no time to begin asking, "It is right, or is it wrong to yield?" That question stands a small chance of being wisely considered at a moment when, under the goading of roused desire, a man is like a mad bull when it charges. It drops its head and shuts its eyes, and goes right on forward, and no matter what it smashes, like its horns against an iron gate, and damages them and itself or not, on it will go.

So when great temptations arise, and we all know such times in our lives, we are in no condition to discuss that question with ourselves. Sometimes the craving is so vehement that if we could not get this thing that we want without putting our hands through the sulfurous smoke of the bottomless pit, we should thrust them out to grasp it.

But in regard to the smaller commonplace matters of daily life, too, we all know that there are whole regions of our lives which seem to us to be so small, that it is hardly worth while summoning the august thought of right or wrong, to decide then. A thousand smugglers that go across a border, each with a little package of contraband goods that does not pay any duty and tax, make up a large aggregate at the year's end.

It is the trifles of life that shape the life, and it is to them that we so frequently fail in applying honestly and rigidly, the test, "Is it right or is wrong?" "He that is faithful in that which is the least," and conscious down to the smallest things, "is faithful also in much." The legal maxim is, the law does not care about the very smallest matters. What that means as a legal maxim, I do not know. But it is heresy when it comes to conduct and morality.

Look after the pennies, and the dollars will look after themselves. Get the habit of bringing conscience to bear on little things, or you will never be able to bring it to bear when great temptations come and the crisis emerge on your lives. Thus, by reason of the deficiency in the habitual application of conscience to our lives, we slide through, and take for granted that all our ways are right in our eyes.

Then there is another thing. We not only neglect the rigid application of conscience in all our lives, but we have a double standard, and **the notion of right and wrong which we apply to others is very different from that which we apply to ourselves.**

No wonder that the criminal is acquitted and goes away from the tribunal without a stain on his character, when he is his own judge and jury.

"All the ways of man are right in his own eyes." But the very same ways you allow to pass in parade and condone in yourselves, you visit with sharp and unflinching censure in others. That strange self-complacency which we have, which is perfectly undisturbed by the most general confessions of sinfulness, only shine when it is brought up to particular details of faults we all know are very deep in ourselves.

Then there is another thing to be remembered. And that is the enormous and the tragical influence of habit in dulling the mirror of our souls on which our deeds are reflected in their true image. There are places in Europe where the peasantry have become so accustomed to minute and constantly repeated doses of arsenic that it is actually a minister of health to them. What would poison you, is food for them.

We can sit in an auditorium packed and steaming, while the condensed breath is running down the windows, and never be aware of the foulness of the odors and the air. But when we go out and feel the sweet, pure breath of the unpolluted atmosphere, then we know how habit has dulled the lungs.

And so habit dulls the conscience. According to the old saying, "The man that began by carrying a calf can carry an ox at the end, and feel no burden." What we are accustomed to do we scarcely ever recognize to be wrong. And it is these things, which pass because they are habitual, that do more to wreck our lives than occasional outbursts of far worse evils, according to the world's estimate of them. Habit dulls the eye. And more than that, the conscience needs educating just as much as any other faculty. A man says my conscience acquits me. Then the question is "And what sort of conscience do you have that acquits you?" All that your conscience says is that it is right to do right and it is wrong to do wrong.

But for the explanation of what is wrong and what is right you have to go somewhere else than to your conscience. You have to go to your reason and your judgment and your

common sense and a hundred other sources. And then when you have found out what is right and what is wrong, you will hear the voice saying, "Do that and do not do this."

Everyone of us has faults that we know nothing about. We bring them up to the tribunal of our conscience and we wipe our mouths and say we have done no harm. Many things that seem to be virtues are vices, and they think that they do God service.

And so for the individual, so for the community. The perception of what is right and what is wrong needs long educating. I have no doubt that there are hosts of things which public opinion and Christian public opinion regard today as perfectly allowable and innocent, and maybe even praiseworthy, and over which we may ask God's blessings. Maybe later on our descendants will hold up their hands in wonder and say, "How did good Christians tolerate such a condition of things for a moment?" "All of man's ways are right in his own eyes." And he needs a great deal of teaching before he comes to understand what, according to God's will, really is right and what is wrong.

Now, let's turn to the contrasted picture. Secondly, the Divine estimate: norm or standard. We have already pointed out the two emphatic thoughts that lie in that clause "God weigheth," and "weigheth the spirits."

Let us take with these two thoughts the same actions which we sometimes test in our defective and loaded balances. These thoughts have also to be put in the infallible scales. And the actions go with their interpretation in their motive.

"God weigheth the spirits." He reads what we do by His knowledge of what we are. We reveal to one another what we are by what we do. And as is a commonplace, none of us can penetrate, except superficially and often inaccurately, to the motives that actuate. **But the motive is three-fourths of the action.**

God does not go from without, as it were, inwards; from our actions to estimate our character. **But He starts with the charac-**

ter and the motive, the habitual character and the occasional motive. And by these He reads the deed, He weighs ponders, penetrates, to the heart of the thing, and He weighs the spirits.

Man looks on the outward. God looks on the inside. "The Word of God is alive and powerful sharper than any two-edged sword; piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and the joints and the marrow; and is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the mind."

On the one hand, I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And many a deed which the world would condemn and in which we onlookers would see evil, God does not wholly condemn, because He, being the Inlooker as well as the Onlooker, sees the mistaken, yet pure motives that underlay it.

So it is conceivable that the inquisitor, and the heretic, that He sent to the stake, may stand side by side in God's estimate. The one, if he were actuated by pure zeal for the Truth, the other, because he was actuated by self-sacrifice in loyalty to the Lord. And on the other hand, many a deed that goes flaunting through the world in purple and linen, will be stripped of all its gauds and stand naked and ugly before the eyes of Him "With whom we have to do." "He weighs the spirits."

Thirdly, the practical issues of these thoughts. "Commit thy works unto the Lord." That is do not be too sure that you are right because you do not think you are wrong. "There is a way that seemeth right unto the man, but there in is the way of death." We should be very distrustful of our own judgments of ourselves, especially when the judgment permits us to do certain things.

"I know nothing against myself," said the apostle. "Yet I am not hereby justified." And again still more emphatically he lays down a principle: "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in the things which he alloweth."

You may have made the glove too easy by stretching. It is possible that you may think that something is permissible and right which a wiser and more rigid and Christ-like judgment of yourself would have taught you was wrong. Look under the stones for the reptiles. And remember the prayer "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults." And distrust a permitting and easy conscience.

Then again, let us seek the Divine strengthening and illumination. We have to seek that in some very plain ways. Seek it by prayer. **There is nothing so powerful in striping off from our besetting sins their disguises and masks and to go to God with the honest petition.**

"Search me. Try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way of everlasting." If you will do that we shall get answers that will startle us, that will humble us, but that will be blessed beyond all other blessedness. And will bring to the light the hidden things of darkness.

Then after they are brought to light and cast out, "Then shall every man have praise of God." We ought to keep ourselves in very close union with Jesus Christ, because if we cling to Him in simple faith, He will come into our hearts. And we shall be saved from walking in darkness, and have the light of life shining down upon our deeds.

Christ is the conscience of the Christian's conscience, who by His voice in the hearts that wait upon Him says, "Do this," and they do it. It is when He is in our spirits that our estimates of our selves is set right, and that we hear the voice saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." And not merely do

we hear the voice, but we get help to our feet in running in the way of His Word with enlarged and confirmed hearts for the discovery of our faults, which we ought to long for and for the conquest of these discovered faults, which if we are Christians, we do long for. Our confidence is in Him.

And if you trust Him, then "The blood of Christ keeps on cleansing you from all sin." because it comes into our life's blood.

The last principle: We must punctiliously obey every dictate that speaks in our own consciences, especially when it urges us to unwelcome duties or restrains us from too welcome sins. "To him that hath shall be given." The sure way to condemn ourselves to utter blindness as to our true selves is to pay no attention to the glimmers of light that we have. While on the other hand, the sure way to be led into fuller illumination is to follow faithfully whatsoever sparkles of light may shine upon our hearts.

"Do the duty that liest nearest thee." Put thy trust in Jesus Christ. Distrust your own approbation or condonation of thine actions. And ever turn to Him and say, "Show me what to do. And make me willing and fit to do it." Then there will be little contrariety between your estimate of your ways, and God's judgments of your spirits.

"If our heart condemns us, God is greater than your hearts and knoweth all things."

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