

Preparation for Intercession

A Spiritual Checkup

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Billy Sunday once said, "Some people take so many pills their joints look like ball bearings." It's a sick, sick world. It is always a good idea to get a physical checkup at least a couple times a year. These physical checkups cost a bit of your time and some inconvenience. But if the beginnings of a dangerous illness are discovered, then the cost is well worth it.

Now, something is very wrong with the world. The Christian is supposed to have the answer to the moral plague sweeping the nations. But something is very wrong with the average Christian church.

- There is supposed to be love, but there is envying, strife and division.
- There is supposed to be holiness, but there is often downright ungodliness instead.
- There is supposed to be power, but there is largely only weakness and spiritual sickliness.
- We are supposed to have revival, but on the whole we have still not seen any great awakening.

"These things should not be so, my brothers and sisters" (James 3:10).

What is wrong with the church must be the sum total of what is wrong with each individual Christian. If people can have medical checkups for their bodies, why shouldn't there be spiritual checkups to examine the state of our souls? If a physician can prescribe pills for bodily ailments, does not the Master Physician have one for the diseased soul? And of course, He does – the "Gos-pill" ... which means, of course, "Good News."

However, before we can be given the Good News, we should thoroughly understand the Bad News. Before a cure can be accepted and applied, there must be diagnosis. To achieve this, some sort of spiritual checkup is needed. That is precisely what this article is all about.

One caution – like any checkup, this is going to cost you time and inconvenience. However, unlike the physical checkup it may also hurt somewhat. Of course, a sore spot shows infection present. When you go through this remember it is designed to

expose, and that exposure might hurt! Be assured however, that a little pain now may save an awful lot of trouble later.

If it is any consolation before you begin, this checkup is absolutely free. It will only cost you, of course, on diagnosis, your sin. Of all things, you can afford to lose that, can't you? Nobody in their right mind wants to keep a killer cancer.

Ready?

To take this spiritual checkup you will need only pencil, paper, some time – and complete honesty.

CASE HISTORY. For the next hour or so, let the Holy Spirit turn His searchlight on your spiritual life. Let Him probe, X-ray and test your soul! And let Him start by opening the closets of your memory.

Memory is highly efficient at remembering wrong. Although it easily forgets merely unpleasant or worthless things, it NEVER forgets un-righted SIN. Much mental illness today can be traced to GUILT never wiped from the mind by the twin tools of confession and restoration – and receiving forgiveness. Shock, drugs and other medical and psychiatric treatment may try to take guilt memories from the mind, but God's method is the only fully effected one – FACE each wrong with its full load of guilt, admit it to God and others who are involved as wrong, then ask and receive healing forgiveness. (Psalm 32:1-5; 1 John 1:5-9)

Use the following three lists as checkup charts to examine your life before the Lord. Take each one slowly and carefully. Check each area that is a "sore spot" and on your own paper write out what you will have to do to get it right. Confess them to the Lord one by one as He shows them to you. When you have finished, REREAD your list again, and add any others that come to mind. Don't give in to the temptation to pass quickly over any area that hurts. Take your courage in your bare hands; face your sin. This first part will be painful. Let God plow your heart and break up all the hardness that has formed from unconfessed sin. If tears begin to come, let them. "For sadness as intended by God produces a repentance that leads to salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:10) and tears may soften your heart for God to work with it. (Psalm 38:18; 34:6,18; 51:17; Ecclesiastes 7:3; Psalm 147:3; Ezekiel 34:16; Luke 4:18)

Memory Test

Stealing

Can you remember taking money for property that was not yours? Did you steal from neighbours, relatives, shops or

stores, school or home?

Exodus 20:15; Ephesians 4:28

Cheating

Did you get anything from anyone unfairly? Does someone know or suspect that you cheated to pass an important test? Did you rob someone of their fair share of praise or pay for a job?

James 5:1-4; Malachi 3:5; Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Jeremiah 22:13; Job 31:13

Lying

"Any designed form of deception for selfish reasons." If you design to make an impression contrary to the naked truth, you have lied. Have you been deceitful?

Revelation 21:8

Slander

Speaking evil of someone. You do not have to lie to slander. Have you talked about someone behind their back in a way you would not to their face? Malicious gossip – telling the truth with intent to hurt or injure is slander. Are you guilty of backbiting or criticism?

Matthew 7:1-5; 5:21-24; 1 Corinthians 5:12; Colossians 3:8

Immorality

Are you guilty of stirring up desires that you could not righteously feed? In outings with the opposite sex have you failed to keep your body and mind clean and pure, and exchanged your integrity for pleasure? Have you been involved in pornography or romance novels?

Matthew 5:28; Job 31:1; 2 Peter 2:14; 1 Corinthians 6:18

Censoriousness

"Severely critical." Have you spoken about others without love? Did you judge, think or say the worst thing about a person?

John 7:24; 1 Corinthians 4:1-7; Galatians 6:1

Action Test

Envy

Behind talk of other's failures and faults usually lurks envy. Did you gossip and boast to exalt yourself at another's expense? Does it hurt to hear certain people praised?

Job 5:2; Proverbs 14:30; 27:4; Galatians 5:25

Pride Pretending in thought or life to be more or less than you really are. Do you pay more attention to your looks than your soul? Is there a trouble-stirring spirit in your life? These are the signs of pride.

Proverbs 16:5; 12:18; 21:4; 29:23; Titus 3:9; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 1 Peter 5:1

Ingratitude How many times have others gone out of their way for you, perhaps really sacrificed to help you – and you took this all for granted?

2 Timothy 3:2; Malachi 3:8-11

Anger Have you been bad-tempered? Did you shrug off self-control and lose patience or gentleness with someone?

Proverbs 14:29; 15:8; 21:9; 22:24; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Ephesians 4:26; Colossians 3:8

Cursing Have you used gutter language? Swearing has no place in the life of a child of God. Never use exclamations beginning with "G", "J", or "C"; they are usually substitutes for curses against God. Have you failed to guard your speech?

Deuteronomy 5:11; Matthew 5:33-37

Levity "Needless frivolity, silly talk – talking and acting like a moron." Jests that tend to undermine the sacred and precious standards of life; "Bible" jokes that make light of the Holy Word of God; unprofitable, empty and often stupid foolishness achieves nothing but a dangerous devaluation of the Christian's word. Real humour is a gift of God, and will always edify or prepare the way for the Holy Spirit; foolish levity is sin.

Ecclesiastes 5:3; Proverbs 24:19; Ephesians 5:4

Inner Inspection

Hardness Did you fight back, murmur or return evil for evil? Was your response to trial un-Christlike when you were wronged or hurt by someone?

Philippians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 10:10

Habits	<p>Have you continually overindulged natural appetites until they have grown far beyond normal? Are you a slave to food, drink or stimulants?</p> <p>Philippians 3:19; Proverbs 23:21; 1 Corinthians 6:19</p>
Half-heartedness	<p>Can you remember times when you deliberately shirked your full share of responsibility? Did you skip times of secret or public prayer to please yourself when you should have been meeting with God? Have you been flippant and light with Him?</p> <p>Proverbs 19:15; 21:5; 24:11-12; Matthew 25:1-13; 25:14-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; James 4:13-17</p>
Hindrance	<p>Have you destroyed another's confidence in you by needlessly taking up their time? Have you prevented them from doing God's work?</p> <p>Ephesians 5:16</p>
Hypocrisy	<p>Is everything you said of Christ and His gospel a lie because of the life you live? Have you said one thing and done another? Were others turned from God by your life that declared to them your hypocrisy?</p> <p>Matthew 6:5-6; 7:3-5; 23:28; Revelation 3:15-16</p>
Broken Vows	<p>Is there a vow you made to God that you have not kept? Did you promise Him something that you have since forgotten or gone back upon? If it was unwise, you had better ask forgiveness and release; He expects you to keep voluntary vows!</p> <p>Ecclesiastes 5:1-6</p>

Surgery Needed?

If the Holy Spirit shows us sin, we must go back to the place where the Lord first met us. It is the cross again. We see the Lord Jesus once crucified – for that sin – bearing our penalty.

A line of blood trickles down from its splintered base. The sight should shock and grieve us; we see the awfulness of God's judgment. This is not the law, representing God armed with holy wrath and determined to punish the sinner without hope or help. Rather, it is LOVE demonstrated in the infinite cost God is

willing to pay and the sacrifice He is willing to make in order to save us from sin. It is the most terribly beautiful picture of the Gospel, showing God's hatred for sin and heartbreak over man's selfishness. Our sin nails Him to the cross all over again. We tear open His wounds and make His redemption a mockery. All God's care and love – and dare we still sin?

Walk out into the light of reality. Drop your self-deceit and face this sin for what it really is. Turn from it, from your heart. Take sides against it with God; purpose in your heart never to go back into that sin again.

"O God, you are aware of my foolish sins; my guilt is not hidden from you" (Psalm 69:5). "For the sake of your reputation, O Lord, forgive my sin, because it is great" (25:11). "If you, O Lord, were to keep track of sins, O Lord, who could stand before you? But you are willing to forgive, so that you might be honored" (130:3-4).

Will you do this now? Will you go to your gracious and loving Father as a little child and humbly ask His forgiveness?

"But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "The Lord is compassionate and merciful ... He does not deal with us as our sins deserve; he does not repay us as our misdeeds deserve. For as the skies are high above the earth, so his loyal love towers over his faithful followers. As far as the eastern horizon is from the west, so he removes the guilt of our rebellious actions from us" (Psalm 103:8-12).

Confession

- Confession is humbling yourself and admitting your wrong.
- Restitution is the willingness to pay back or restore whatever possible.

If you are now forgiven before the Lord, are you ready to ask Him for the courage to confess and restore to others you have wronged? Your conscience must be clean before both God and man if you want to know true freedom. You cannot stand for God with a dirty past in the eyes of others; memories of failure in their eyes will drive you deeper into bondage each time you remember them. When you have not asked their forgiveness, your guilt will kill your faith and rob you of direction and purpose.

You will not, of course, have to confess every sin to everyone; just the sins committed against the ones you know you have wronged. The RULE: The circle of CONFESSION should only go as far as the circle of COMMITMENT. Those sins against God alone you have left with His loving forgetfulness (Psalm 103:8-13; Isaiah

43:25; Jeremiah 31:34). Those sins against God and man must be put right with both God and the person(s) wronged.

Restitution should only go as far as you can humanly repay. You will never be able to undo all your wrong, but God expects you to do all in your power to restore that which you have taken from others; no more and certainly no less. God asks of you the willingness, if need be, to go to a hundred people to restore a relationship. True, total repentance is to do that which is right up to the full limit of your ability. It concerns only that which is KNOWN and RECOGNIZED to be sin by the repentant one. Often those who see your sincerity may make exceptions to any claims they have to restitution, but you will have to trust your case to the hands of God, who does all things well.

Getting Right With Others

Name the basic sin! You can never really undo the results of your sin; no one can really forgive you for these. However you can always (and must!) right the sin itself, by naming it and asking forgiveness for it. Confess the sin that caused your words or actions; God will show you what it is. What was your real wrong? Write it down so you can see it. Are you sure that was what it was?

Make sure the way you ask is right. Such half-hearted "confessions" as the ones below show false or incomplete repentance and are usually worse than useless:

- I'm sorry – but it wasn't all my fault!
- Forgive me – if I have wronged you ...
- I was wrong – but so were you!
- Alright – I'm sorry. I apologize.

Full blame must be taken; the sin must be named; pride must be crucified.

- Do you know the basic sin you must get right?
- Have you thought through what you are to say?
- Is the time convenient for the other person?
- Can you be alone when you see this person?

Do you have a truly repentant attitude? If you have trouble getting the proper feelings, think of all the hurt and loss your sin has caused. What did your sin cost Christ (Luke 22:39-44; John 15:8-14)? The Holy Spirit convicts by recalling from your memory in detail all the results of your wrong. Go over your sin in specific detail; never in general. As you think deeply about the effect of your sin, feelings will come equal to your guilt.

Is the other person in a mood to forgive? If they get angry when you arrive, wait quietly in a repentant manner until their temper is under control. Then acknowledge your sin and ask forgiveness. Pray for help before you go (Proverbs 22:24; Matthew 5:43-48). Don't use words taking the blame off yourself. Don't involve others who may have also sinned. Don't try to witness as well, unless specifically asked why you are making this thing right. Don't underestimate your guilt or their hurt. And don't wait too long to go and get it right!

The elements of these three sentences must be in any truly effective confession:

1. God has convicted me of something I did (have been doing) against you ...
2. I've been wrong in ... (name the basic sin: envy, pride, stubbornness, etc.)
[The only exception to this is a moral offense. Say, "I have not set a decent standard."]
3. I know I've wronged you in this, and I want to ask: Will you forgive me?

Excuses From Pride: When it comes to getting right with others, our minds supply many "reasons" why we need not do what we know we must. Be brutally honest with yourself. Deal with each excuse. Determine to do what is right. It's your life!

When you have gone through your list as thoroughly as if you were about to meet God before the throne of Judgment and determined to get right everything you can, you may burn your list and leave your sins forgiven and forgotten forever! Wrongs may not be wiped out completely from your mind, but they can be exchanged for memories of the joy of forgiveness! Should Satan try to recall a dark past shadow, you will be able to think instead of the bright memory of confession and forgiveness. The word of pardon from those who accept our confession will put wings on our hearts and move us mightily to praise God for His forgiveness.

Many millions are jailed in their own guilt this very day in your world, not knowing what to do or who to turn to. To some, the last road of suicide seems the only possible escape. Minds are snapping from the terrible load of guilt of a filthy past. It is up to you now to put into practice what you know must be done. Your testimony will be a ray of hope to any you come in contact with. Don't just read this. In His Name, go and DO IT!