



LIFE APPLICATIONS “I CORINTHIANS”

Chapter 11

SELF-EXAMINATION

A vital practice for experiencing true repentance is regularly engaging in thorough self-examination. Elder Amphilochios Makris advises, “It is necessary and beneficial for a general self-examination to take place from time to time, remembering all former sins.”

As with repentance itself, effective self-examination is initiated by God: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). God emphasizes that He does in fact search our hearts: “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.” While we must engage in self-examination, we are only able to acknowledge our sins because of the work of God; we otherwise would blind ourselves to our failings.

Metropolitan Antony Bashir outlines the basic process of self-examination:

- 1) the desire for self-examination;
- 2) self-conviction (admitting one’s sins); and
- 3) self-realization (realizing that we are self-absorbed, and need to return to God).

Panayiotis Christou notes that monastics engage in daily self-examination to discover if they are engaged in the “eight mortal thoughts:” gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sorrow, despondency, vanity and pride.

St. Nicolas Varzhansky suggests asking ourselves a number of questions for self-examination before confession. Below are some of these questions:

- Do you pray to God in the morning and evening, before and after meals?
- During prayer have you allowed your thoughts to wander?
- Do you read the Scriptures daily? Do you read other spiritual writings regularly?
- Have you sinned by forgetting God?
- Have you been slack in attending church?
- Have you kept the fasts?
- Have you tried to pay reverent attention to the readings, hymns, and prayers in church?
- Are you ever angry, bad tempered or irritable?
- Have you entertained bad feelings, ill will or hatred against anyone?
- Have you forgiven those who have offended you?
- Have you asked forgiveness from those whom you have offended?
- Are you obstinate, and do you always try to have your own way?

- Have you been inconsiderate of other people's feelings?
- Have you been proud? Do you boast of your abilities, achievements, family, connections or riches?
- Have you sinned in thought, word or deed, by a look or glance, or in any other way against the seventh commandment?
- Have you wasted your time, energy or abilities in things that do not profit the soul?
- Do you care for and seek first the salvation of your soul, the spiritual life and the kingdom of God, or have you put earthly considerations in the first place?
- Is there any other sin, which burdens your conscience, or which you are ashamed to tell?

One of the most notable practices utilized by Orthodox Christians that exhibit the most profound insight into the Orthodox understanding of self-examination and repentance is the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."