"Have a look in the mirror"

When I was asked to prepare a lesson on self examination, the first thing which came to my mind is, ‘this is a perfect sermon for a visiting speaker, this is one of those sermons that church leaders will get someone in to do the job.’ But I need to be honest, I discovered that this sermon was also challenging for me to put together because I had to ask myself the same difficult questions we are going to look at today. And loved ones, let me be up font here, there are a lot of questions we need to ask ourselves.

I heard a story about an older couple who decided they needed to do something to improve their health and so they decided they would go for a 2-mile walk everyday. They would get up early every morning, walk down the road one-mile turn around and come back. So that 1st day they got up and made it about a mile down the road and the husband looked over to his wife and says, "are you doing ok darling?" she said, "yes", "are you sure you can make it? She said, "Yes", he said, "good, then walk back to the house and get the car and come and get me."

And I guess the point of the story is we very often become lazy not only in our physical health but also in our spiritual health. We like it when things are going well in our faith and we never have to question it and when someone comes along and questions us about our beliefs we sometimes tend to change the subject and not deal with the question at all.

And the reason we do that sometimes is because we don’t have the answer at that point in time. But when those questions come we need to be honest with the people who are asking questions and honest with ourselves.

You see, there is nothing wrong with being honest with others and saying I don’t know the answer to that question but I will get back to you. But there is something seriously wrong when all we do is point out other people’s mistakes in their beliefs if we’re not willing to take a close look at ourselves.

The Bible calls us to continually examining ourselves. A way back in the days of Jeremiah when God’s people had turned from the Lord. We find Jeremiah mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem and he writes in Lamentations 3:40-41, “Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven.”

When the apostle Paul was writing to the church in Corinth about there attitude towards the Lord’s Supper, he tells them in 1 Corinthians 11:27-31 “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment”.

A little while later Paul addresses the church in Corinth again and asks them to examine their faith in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-unless, of course, you fail the test?”

And it’s in this passage where Paul uses the Greek word Πιεράζω which means to examine or prove, but the interesting thing about this word is that it means that the examination or proving is ongoing.

Loved ones as Christians we are to continually examine ourselves and so the logical question which should follow is why? Paul says, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith." Now that is one reason why it is important to examine our beliefs. Its one thing declaring that you’re a Christian but it’s another thing to declare that you are a faithful Christian.
“Have a look in the mirror”

I like that advertisement on TV when the man and woman are in a shop and she's trying on some new clothes and she asks her husband, "Do you think these jeans make me look fat?" and he says, "No, it's your fat that makes you look fat."

Some people are obsessed with how they look physically to the point where they spend most of their lives looking in the mirror. And as Christians we too can get easily tangled up with external matters. And we as Christians clothe ourselves in external matters but we forget to look where it matters most, we forget to look internally at ourselves.

Let me ask you, does your belief system have any dangers? In other words, do you believe in once saved always saved or does your faith keep you alert to the dangers of falling from grace? Hebrews 2:1 “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away”.

The Hebrew writer tells us that it is possible to drift away from the faith. In the next chapter the same writer says in Hebrews 3:12-14 "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness”.

The Hebrew writer tells us it is possible to develop an evil heart of unbelief. Take a look at the people around you today and ask yourself, who is missing? I've heard too many Christians declaring their love for God and they say that they will never fall away from the Lord, only to find out a few years later they are no longer faithful. 1 Corinthians 10:12 “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!”

Is your faith, a faith which allows you to do whatever you want or is your faith a faith which can be lost? I remember when I was little, my parents used to wake me up every Sunday morning with the sound of a woman named Lena Martel who sung a song and the first few lines of the chorus says, “One day at a time sweet Jesus.”

The Hebrew writer asks us to encourage one another daily, but why daily? I'll tell you why, because I don’t know if I will be faithful tomorrow. I hope and pray I will be, I hope and pray that you will be, but you don’t know what’s going on in my life and I don’t know what's going on in your life.

But I have learned not to take my faith for granted but to take my faith one day at a time and thank Jesus for it. But the question I always have to ask myself is, is my faith, the faith that Jesus wants me to have? Is it the faith we see in the Scriptures which warns me about the dangers of falling away?

Another way to examine ourselves is to ask the question, is Christ living in me? Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-unless, of course, you fail the test?" In other words does the faith which I'm declaring to the world, is it the faith which is reflecting the image of Christ in my life?

Anyone who has ever used a computer spell checker has seen some of the insane recommendations a spell checker will make for seemingly common words that, for some reason, were not included in the checker's dictionary. For example there was a Bible student who was asked by his teacher to write a paper on "Lifting up the Name of Jesus". When he had finished typing the words into his word processor, he ran a spell check. The program stopped at the word "Jesus" with the comment, "Does not exist." This prompted a later paper in which the student
Have a look in the mirror“ reminded his readers "Jesus does not exist in anybody’s vocabulary, including a spell-checker's, until you intentionally insert it."

Jesus dwelling in us is an amazing thought isn’t it? But Jesus dwelling in us can only be done when we intentionally do what is required by Jesus for Him to dwell in us. John 14:21-24 “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”.

Is your faith, a faith that just requires belief or does your faith ask obedience of you too? And at what point does Jesus take up residence in our bodies? Galatians 3:26-27 “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”. Christ living in us begins when we put on Christ in baptism.

Now I can’t go down to the local hospital and ask them to give me an x-ray to see if I can spot Christ hovering around inside my body somewhere. I can’t go down the street and say, ‘hey! I’m a Christian look inside me and you will see Jesus.’

We shouldn’t need to show anyone we’re Christians because they should already know we’re Christians by our actions. I don’t fully understand how Jesus lives in me but by faith I accept that He does and that should lead me to examine myself daily and ask the question, does my life display Christ?

In other words does my life reflect the fruit of the Spirit? Galatians 5:22-26 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit”.

We need to ask ourselves the question, does my faith reflect Christ living in me? Is my faith heard from the words which come from my mouth? Hebrews 13:15 “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name”.

Is my faith eager to do good works like Paul told Titus in 2:14? Because you see loved ones if our faith is not Biblical faith, the eternal consequences are going to be serious. Because Paul goes on to say in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-unless, of course, you fail the test?”

What does Paul mean when he says, “you fail the test”? Well basically he means, if you’re proclaiming the faith of the Bible and you’re claiming Jesus is living in you then test yourself regularly to see if that’s still the case.

Because if you’re not living according to the Bible and Christ isn’t reflected in your life then maybe you’re falling. Maybe you’re falling away without even realising it. In other words like I said earlier my faith should be aware that I can fall away. And it usually starts when a Christian begins to rely on his own efforts for salvation rather than relying on Christ’s.

I’m not saved because of my good works; I’m saved because of Christ’s work on the cross at Calvary. I’m not saved because I perform well here; I’m saved because Christ performed like no man could on Calvary.
“Have a look in the mirror”

Do remember Jesus dying words on the cross? John 19:30 Jesus said, "It is finished." In other words everything to do with our sin problem was dealt with at Calvary. Everything do to with our salvation was dealt with at Calvary. In other words I don’t do good works for my salvation; I do good works because of my salvation. We don’t rely on our own efforts for salvation but we totally trust the efforts of Christ for our salvation. Galatians 5:4 “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace”.

Peter warns us about much the same thing when he talks about relying on other people for our faith rather than the faith we find in the Bible in 2 Peter 3:17-18 “Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position”. But the point I’m trying to make is that it is only through self-examination can we truly know where we are at in relation to our faith and Christ dwelling in us.

Old mystic said this about himself: "I was a revolutionary when I was young, and my prayer to God was, 'Lord, give me the strength to change the world.' As I approached middle age and realized that my life was halfway gone without changing a single soul, I changed my prayer to, 'Lord, give me the grace to change all those who come into contact with me, especially my family and friends, and I shall be satisfied.' Now that I am an old man, and my days are numbered, I have begun to see how foolish I have been. Now my one prayer is this, 'Lord, give me the grace to change myself.'

You know there are times when we deceive ourselves without realising it, when we’re constantly looking at the religious world around us and pointing our fingers at them.

We started a ‘understanding other religious beliefs’ series on our Wednesday evening Bible class at Great Barr and we have covered everything from Jehovah’s Witnesses to the Mormons. And the first Scripture we read before we get stuck into our study is 1 Peter 3:15+16, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” But what we also did to finish off the study series was to look at what the critics say about our beliefs and we spent some time answering the questions they had of us. Now as a congregation we felt that this was a useful study series because if it did anything, it really helped us understand other religious beliefs but it also strengthened our faith in the Bible.

Now loved ones, the only standard we can use to examine other people’s beliefs is the Bible. The only standard we can use to examine our own beliefs is the Bible, but we need to be willing to look into the Bible and search through it for the truth. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:6 “I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.”

Something can only be discovered if we take the time to look for it. Paul basically says, "Do you not know yourselves?" Loved ones we have to examine ourselves regularly because we can easily fall into the trap of self deception.

How many women do you know have gone for plastic surgery because they have convinced themselves their breasts are too small? How many super models do you know have gone on some crash diet because they have convinced themselves they are too fat? How many men do you know who go to the gym everyday of the week because they have convinced themselves that their muscles are not big enough? How many men do you know who just need one more tin of beer or one more drug because they have convinced themselves that they can’t get through the day without them?
“Have a look in the mirror”

James 1:22-25 “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does”.

How many religious people do you know who have convinced themselves that they are OK with God because the preacher says so? How many religious people do you know who have convinced themselves they are going to heaven because they are a good person?

You see Satan is the father of lies and he does it well. But he doesn’t have to lie and convince people that Jesus isn’t coming back, he lies and convinces people that, Jesus isn’t coming back today. And that’s within itself is a sobering thought isn’t it?

Now it’s all very well examining ourselves but we still need a standard to examine ourselves by don’t we? Proverbs 14:12 “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death”.

And if your examining your faith by your own standards, then I ask that you listen closely to the apostle Paul’s words as we find them in 2 Corinthians 10:18, “For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends”.

Paul says we can’t rely upon what we think of ourselves because we are approved only if the Lord commends us. In other words even though we may think we’re right and sincere, we’re not the final judge. 1 Corinthians 4:4 “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me”.

You see we need to be honest with ourselves because we can be wrong in our basic assumptions, which can lead to wrong conclusions about ourselves. After all one the greatest apostles who ever lived was a perfect example wasn’t he?

Acts 26:9-11 "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them”.

According to the apostle Paul, he thought that persecuting Christians was pleasing to God, but sadly as we know he was wrong in that assumption. There are going to be many good and sincere people on Judgment Day who thought that what they were doing was pleasing to God.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, `Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, `Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, `I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

Loved ones we cannot look to ourselves as the standard by which we examine ourselves. And we cannot examine ourselves by the standard of others either. Listen carefully again to the way The Message translates Proverbs 14:12, “There’s a way of life that looks harmless enough; look again, it leads straight to hell”.

If you found the material in this sermon useful, please feel free to use it. Other sermons, which cover a multitude of topics are available by e-mail request.
“Have a look in the mirror”
We are living in a society where ‘thus says the Lord’ has been replaced with ‘thus says the preacher.’ And people are saying, ‘Amen’ to things that sound good and right. But Solomon has just warned us that we better check out their words and we better check out our own lives because if they are wrong and we’re living wrong then the path we’re on will only lead us to hell.

Whenever we begin to measure ourselves with the religious world around us. Whenever we begin to look for approval from the world, we are going to find ourselves measuring up to the wrong standards.

2 Corinthians 10:12 “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise”.

Let me ask you, what are you doing as I speak today? Are you sitting there saying in your mind, ‘Amen’? When we’re finished today, are you going to go home and say that was a wonderful day, really enjoyed it? Or are you going to check out what I’m saying like the Bereans did with Paul’s words in Acts 17:11 to see if they are true?

What I’m saying is don’t trust me because I’m a preacher, trust the only standard which really matters, God’s word. Remember that Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:18 that it is the approval of the Lord that makes a person approved. He says in 1 Corinthians 4:4 that it is the Lord who is the final judge. Jesus Himself said in John 12:48, “There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day”.

I heard a story about a woman who was in a car accident with her two year old son. When they finally got to the hospital, the woman was in slight shock but the little boy was in intensive care fighting for his life. Anyway a few hours went by and so she asked the doctor how here son was doing, and the doctor said, ‘Oh he’s improving.’ An hour later she asked again, ‘how’s my son doing?’ And again the doctor said, ‘he’s improving’.

Well this went on all night and the doctor kept saying ‘he’s improving, he’s improving’, until early the next morning, he said to the woman, ‘I’m sorry your son has died.” The woman shouted back at the doctor and asked, ‘Well, what did he die of, improvements!”

Loved ones there is only one standard by which we must judge ourselves and that is the standard we find within the word of God. The world believes it has an improvement over God’s will but the Bible teaches us is that if we believe the world we are going die of improvements. We cannot trust our feelings, we cannot trust what others might say, we can only trust God and His words.

You know becoming a Christian is the easy part for many people but trying to live the Christian life is another struggle altogether for us all. And so loved ones let me wrap all this up and bring it a little closer to home because we cannot seriously judge anyone or any other religious group until we have fully examined ourselves.

But please keep in mind it is scriptural to go on for another ten minutes because Paul did with the Philippian letter, he says in Philippians 4:8 ‘Finally brothers’ and goes on for another 15 verses. So let me ask you, are you abiding in Jesus’ words which He told us to do in John 8:31?

Jesus writes to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, he tells them in verses 4+5 “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”
"Have a look in the mirror"

Now I have never heard of a couple who go to bed one night who are deeply and passionately in love with each other and then they wake up in the morning only to find they don’t love each other any more. That’s not how it happens. What happens is that over a period of time they tend to take that relationship for granted and then over a period of time they discover that they just don’t love each other like they did at first.

That’s what happens with many Christians, they take that relationship with God for granted. And when communication breaks down with any couple there is always going to be disaster ahead. Have you stopped communicating with God in prayer and stopped living according to God’s word? Maybe you haven’t read God’s word for a while and the only time you hear it is on Sunday mornings when everyone else is saying ‘Amen’ your saying, ‘Thus sayeth the preacher.’

Are you abiding in His words? What about bearing fruit? Are you producing good fruit? The good fruit like we read earlier in Galatians 5:22+23. The fruit of our lips in praising God like we saw in Hebrews 13:15. The fruit of good works like read about in Titus 2:14.

If you’re a visitor today what is the preacher like at the church you attend? You know there are many great and powerful preachers in Britain today but how can you tell if they are abiding in Jesus’ words? How can you tell that Jesus lives in them?

Matthew 7:15-20 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them”.

Are they producing good fruit? Is there lives reflecting what they are preaching? What about your relationship with God and His people, how is that going? Do you enjoy meeting together for worship? Or has it become a burden? Hebrews 10:25 “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching”.

There was a church in the highlands that used to have revival meetings every spring, and there was an old man who would come every spring, he would come back to God. He would be hot all through the summer, but he would cool off in the autumn and by wintertime, he would get cold and drop out, but every spring he would get fired up again. So the first night of revival he was on the back seat, the next night he moved up 2 rows and the next night he moved up another 2 rows, and by the 4th or 5th night he’s down the front shouting, “Fill me Lord, fill me” and a lady that knew him well said, “Careful Lord he leaks”.

And that’s a real problem for a lot of Christians, they tend to leak. When we were baptised into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and God begun to live in us in the form of His Spirit, we were so on fire for the Lord and we would happily to anything for His cause.

But now you’ve been a Christian for a few years and that fire is just not the same anymore. I know I have been asking a lot of questions today but I don’t apologise for them. Because the only way to seriously look at ourselves it to seriously ask ourselves some serious questions. And that’s what I’m going to leave you with today, even more questions just for you to answer in your own mind.

What are some of the signs that might indicate that you may be falling away? I’ve suffered some of these symptoms, but you can just take them for what they are worth.
“Have a look in the mirror”

One sign is that prayer is no longer a vital part of your life; it’s just something you do occasionally. Another sign is that you’ve grown content with your Biblical understanding and you don’t hunger for more. You’ve acquired about all the knowledge of the Bible you need. Another sign is that when you study the Bible it’s for information and not for transformation. You can sit in Bible class and talk about the Bible for hours but not be any different when it’s through.

Another sign is that thoughts of eternal things are rare. The temporary dominates all of your thinking. Another sure sign is that the gathering of God’s people is not eagerly anticipated. You can hear someone say, “We are having a fellowship day here in Liverpool and were inviting a lot of other congregations” And you sit there and you know in your heart that you have absolutely no intentions of going. You are not even thinking about going because it isn’t even important to you to even think about going.

Another sign is that pointed spiritual discussion embarrasses you. It can be at work, down the street or even in the church foyer. Someone gets talking a bit too much about Jesus and you just want to kind of change the subject. Another sure sign is that certain sins can be indulged in without an uproar in your conscience. Another sign is you can easily mouth hymns and scriptures, but nothing happens in your heart.

Another sign is that you can hear God’s name being used wrongly and His standards being put down, but nothing ever happens in your heart. Another sign is division and quarrels in the church don’t bother you. Another sign is that you are slow to respond when you hear of an opportunity to minister and serve in the church.

Another sign is that injustice and human misery never crosses your mind. Another sure sign is that the lossless of people without Christ never crosses your mind. You never stop in the city centre or somewhere and think, these people don’t have Christ. Another sign is that you hardly ever think about or sense God’s presence in your life. Another sign is that strong desire to just praise Him for His grace hardly ever fires up in your heart.

Now I don’t know if that strikes a cord with you or not, but you know if you have drifted away from that love relationship you used to have with God and His people.

A woman and her husband had to interrupt their holiday to go to a dentist. When they finally found a dentist the woman said, "I want a tooth pulled, and I don't want any injections because I'm in a big hurry." She went on to say to the dentist, "Just extract the tooth as quickly as possible, and we'll be on our way." The dentist was quite impressed and said, "You're certainly a courageous woman, which tooth is it?" And so the woman turned to her husband and said, "Show him your tooth, dear."

It’s easy to point out flaws in other people’s beliefs and challenge them to look at themselves, but it takes courage to examine our own beliefs and examine our own life’s too. Loved ones, like were going to look at next, we can’t seriously contend for the faith until we seriously live the faith we’re contending for. We can’t preach to people about how they should live their lives according to the Bible until we take a look in the mirror at ourselves and see if we are living right.

If after reading this you want to know more about being right with God or if this sermon has raised other questions in your thoughts then please just contact me and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

God bless and thanks for taking the time to grow in your understanding of God’s Word.