

An annual checkup, we're all supposed to have one; be it for your house or your car, your finances or your health.

Well, what about your spiritual health? When was the last time you had a personal spiritual checkup?

Paul writes to the Corinthians that they should “examine themselves...” before taking communion.

Our text this morning from his letter to the Romans is the summary report of that examination: to be able to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, to God which is your spiritual worship.”

It was the custom in the Presbyterian church up until the early 1900s for the Session to provide just such an examination, a checkup before Communion to determine, if you will, whether you were ‘spiritually healthy’ for receiving the bread and cup of the Lord’s Supper.

No, we don’t do that anymore, but I would urge you to consider a checkup of your spiritual health, especially to be fit and faithful to begin the disciple-work with a new pastor!

One of the challenges of our time is that many people have no awareness of their need for spiritual health.

“Our task,” said the great Jewish scholar, Abraham Heschel, “is to bring God back into the world, into our lives. To worship is to expand the presence of God in the world.”

Or as Jesus said it, “Go into the world, teaching them all I’ve commanded you....”

Paul is writing to the Corinthians and Romans and to you and me, “If you are going to do the disciple-work of the great commission, you need a spiritual checkup to make sure you’re fit and faithful.”

So, what do we check? I have four words for our checkup: Confession, Conflict, Conversation, and Change.

Are we going to get good numbers, low numbers, bad numbers, high numbers?

First of all...CONFESSON. This might be considered the ‘stress’ test for a spiritual checkup.

Max Lucado, one of my favorite writers, says that “confession is telling God you did the thing he saw you do. God doesn’t need to hear it as much as you need to say it.”

We did some things we should not have done; we failed to do some things we should have done.

When we’ve substituted hatred for love; for every sneer and snub, for every unkind word and unjust judgment, for every self-righteous opinion, we need to confess.

It is not our decision to determine whether it is too small to be mentioned or so big we think it can’t be forgiven.

Our task is simply to be honest, to open our hearts to God.

Any personal spiritual checkup begins with confession, and our second word is CONFLICT:

Any unresolved conflicts in our life that need to be made right? High number, low number? Any number isn’t good, is it?

James Baldwin reminds us that “not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

You know the key to new life is often to hear three words, “I forgive you.”

And those three words depend upon three words from you or me: “I am sorry.”

A personal spiritual checkup includes confession and facing unresolved conflicts, and the third word is CONVERSATION: When and where in your life is the word actually a Living Word?

When you look at the monitor for that conversation, is it a steady rate?

I don't mean 'talk about God', which tends to be lecture, or 'talk with God', which is private prayer.

What I wonder about in your spiritual checkup is how your life 'speaks the truth in love'.

Mature Christians are supposed to speak the truth in love, says Paul, a conversation that characterizes our way of life as disciples of Jesus Christ.

But how many times have you been approached by a Christian brother or sister who begins the conversation with, "Now, I'm telling you this because I love you" and then you get a double-barrel shot of grumbling and criticism, degrading words that tear down and never build up.

I love the prayer of the little girl who prayed, "Dear God, make the bad people good and the good people fit to live with."

Of course, with all the people we have here, there will be disagreements, but one of the great lessons I learned from a wise elder in the church, "We can disagree without being disagreeable."

Because the way we talk with each other and the way we talk about each other; the way we live with each other and the way we live for others tells the world about God's love in Jesus Christ.

A personal spiritual checkup includes confession, conflicts, conversation, and finally, the report of a personal spiritual checkup...CHANGE.

When our annual medical checkup is finished, all the test results are in, then our doctors usually have some suggestions for changes in lifestyle as to diet, exercise, adequate rest, relieving stress.

So, the big question for a personal spiritual checkup is, "How are you being transformed to what is good and acceptable and perfect for God?"

What we know from the prophets and John the Baptist, from Paul's letters and from Jesus himself, God is the God who introduces change into our lives.

As God said through the prophet Isaiah, "Behold, I am doing a new thing. Will you not be aware of it?"

This is not change for its own sake, but these are changes which build you up in the body of Christ, changes which allow you to grow closer to God, changes which always accompany anything new.

The problem is that when it comes to spiritual health, we always want everyone else to be better than we are willing to be ourselves.

It's the book we all write, "I'm OK, you're NOT!"

What is at stake for our spiritual health is the change that lies beneath the great question Jesus asked of the paralytic: "Do you want to be healed?"

If you don't, no checkup is needed.

But if you do want to get stronger in your life with Jesus to do the disciple-work, then you are ready to take a personal spiritual checkup: confession, conflict, conversation.

Because we really want to be able to 'present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God', to be fit and faithful for the new thing about to happen.

And then we can see the change, as the old mountain woman did when she said, "I ain't what I ought to be; I ain't what I'm gonna be; but thank God, I ain't what I used to be!"

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.