**The Ultimate “Reality Check”**

*by Harry Osborne*

Robert Burns long ago wrote in the Scots language a poem entitled *“To a Louse”* wherein he said (as worded in modern English),

“O would some power the gift to give us,

To see ourselves as others see us.”

Even in viewing self with respect to secular matters, it is rare that we are able to see ourselves with objectivity. Years ago, I remember hearing one comment on an extraordinarily egotistical speaker, saying, “That guy needs a reality check.” It was the first time I had ever heard that term “***reality check***” and I immediately thought it a concise description of an essential commodity. As needed as it is in human relations, how much greater is the need for a **reality check** in our relationship with God.

The tendency of man has always been to justify himself, but that does not assure his acceptance with God. Solomon long ago affirmed this truth in inspired words:

“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2).

In many ways, mankind was uniquely blessed as Jesus walked upon the earth. One of the ways He had such a great impact was in His teaching that revealed, in His day-to-day teaching, how God really views man’s actions. While the Pharisees viewed themselves as the pinnacle of spirituality, Jesus declared the utter contempt with which God viewed them (Matthew 23:1-36). The Sadducees saw themselves as the educated elite, but Jesus in a few words exposed their ignorance with respect to denying the resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33**). Jesus embodied in His teaching and personal interaction *the ultimate reality check*!** Wisdom dictates that we heed it.

In Luke 16, Jesus first spoke a parable about an unjust steward. The point of the parable was plainly stated when Jesus concluded it: *"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon"* (Luke 16:13). The word "mammon" signifies material goods or wealth.

The Pharisees who heard Him were said to be "lovers of money" (Luke 16:14). They "derided" Jesus for His teaching instead of listening to Him. Thus, Jesus rebuked them saying, *"You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God"* (Luke 16:15).

Jesus went on to cite one example of their frivolous practice of putting away a wife and marrying another as evidence of their evil practice while claiming to do right (Luke 16:18). The Pharisees needed to be sobered up! They needed to understand that their ungodly desire to live for their own pleasure would bring punishment.

The next story in the context was just such a wake-up call or reality check to the Pharisees who took little thought of eternal consequences (Luke 16:19-31). Notice that Jesus did not present this as a parable or fable, but an actual account of what happened with two men - one rich and one poor man named Lazarus. In our time, this story should still strike fear into those callously in sin.

*"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried."*

*"And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, `Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'*

*"But Abraham said, `Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'"*

*"Then he said, `I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, `for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, `They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'"*

*"And he said, `No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, `If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"*

Notice a few lessons taught by this story that were true then and are equally true today.

***First*, punishment beyond this earthly life for the evil doer is a reality.** Some try to escape this fact by saying the story is a parable. Jesus did not say it was a parable. However, if it was a parable, parables related real-life occurrences to teach a lesson. The fact that punishment beyond this earthly life is a reality was plainly taught by Jesus (Matthew 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48).

***Second*, there is no second chance.** Once the rich man was in torment, he desperately wanted a second chance, but none was available. At death, our fate is sealed and our next appointment is the Judgment (Hebrews 9:27). In that Judgment, we will all give answer for the things we did while in the body, not what we would do if we had a second chance (2 Corinthians 5:10).

***Third*, if we want to avoid such punishment beyond, we must listen to God's word now and obey it.** The will of God for the rich man at that time was the law of Moses. Christ took that law out of the way by His cross and replaced it with his Gospel (Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 3:14). We have the same responsibility to hear and obey the Gospel that the rich man had to listen and heed the law of Moses. No supernatural intervention will arise to alter that duty.

If we do not obey that Gospel, we will suffer the vengeance of God (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Thus, we must always seek to know God's will and put it in practice in our lives rather than justifying our present path. The only way to know that will of God is to constantly study His truth. That truth of God is the ultimate “reality check” for us as to our true standing before God.