

12. The danger of not growing

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As we watch our children and grandchildren growing, when they were much younger, they completely depended on us for their safety. To you, younger parents, they are still depending on your protection. They would not have known that they could be in life and death danger if you were not there.

The world is not getting any better, rather getting worse and wicked by the minute. If our children and grandchildren remain defenseless, they would face constant danger in their lives.

But what about our spiritual undergrowth? Last Sunday we studied about the marks of spiritual immaturity and maturity. The Holy Spirit is continually expounding His teaching to us regarding this in chapter 6 through the author of the Book of Hebrews.

This morning, I believe that our Lord will explain about three categories of the elementary precepts of Christianity that we, as born-again believers must learn and move on from there. And He will even show us the greater danger of backsliding from Him.

A. MOVING PAST ELEMENTARY

Hebrews 6:1-3 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again (1) the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 (2) of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, (3) of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits.

One of the main objectives of the Christian is growing upwards, not just growing older, not just wasting time on earth until we get to heaven, not just going over the same basic elementary principles and precepts of Christianity which we already learned when we came to know the Lord Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

The author of this Book lists three categories here:

1) Conversion – Repentance

Without repentance of one's sins, a person cannot say that he or she is really saved. Listen, if a person thinks that he or she really doesn't have anything to repent of, why does that person even need a Savior to be rescued from one's sins that condemn him or her to eternal death? To repent means to change one's mind and the way, not just feeling bad about sin with remorse or regret. Once a sinner has truly repented and confessed to the Lord, then he or she is able to put one's faith in God. Repentance and faith go together.

2) Church policy – Baptism and laying on of hands

In the NT, when a person receives Jesus as one's Savior and Lord, that person is encouraged to be baptized and plugged into a Bible teaching church so that he or she can grow in the Lord.

Let's make it clear. According to the Bible, baptism does NOT save anyone even though some denominations insist.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Baptism is a symbol of spiritual cleansing and public declaration of identifying with Christ's death and resurrection. Nothing more and nothing less.

"Laying on of hands" symbolizes the sharing of God's blessings, as well as the setting apart of a person for ministry. I still remember the time when my pastor Robert Furrow and other elders of Calvary Chapel of Tucson laid their hands on me to pray for me that the Lord would empower me to preach and teach the Word at the beginning of the prison ministry that I was involved in. In the results, I had a captive audience, literally.

3) The chronology of future events – The resurrection of the death and the final judgment

It seems that no other subject is more exciting to Christians than the eschatology which means the end-time prophecy. Obviously, the inquiring minds want to know what is going to happen. I don't have an objection regarding studying the eschatology, but if that is the only thing they are studying, it is like that they are living on M&M, Milky Way Candy Bars and Mountain Dew. They need good balanced spiritual nutrition to grow.

Long ago, there was a Christian brother who was on a hot pursuit of the identity of the antichrist. He came up with all these ideas and formulas and Scripture references. I told him that I didn't care. He looked at me with a puzzled face. I told him, "The antichrist is going to show up after I go to heaven one way or another. So, who cares who he is. I'd rather know my Christ than the antichrist." I don't think that he liked my comment.

Listen, I am not saying that the elementary principles and precepts of Christianity are not important, because they are important. But we need to move past from them to more meaty lessons so that we can grow in the Lord and that's what the Lord wants us to do.

The Lord God called me to be your pastor and teacher of His Word. It is my prayer that you guys would be the best fed congregation in the world, not because what I can do, but because what the Holy Spirit is doing through this very imperfect earthen vessel.

B. THE DANGER OF BACKSLIDING

Hebrews 6:4-8 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

The best way to study the Bible is let God's Word teach us as the Lord intended which is the expository study, not as we think that it should be fitted into our own pre-made theologies. Here at our Calvary Chapel, we put a tremendous emphasis in the expository study of God's Word, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and Book by Book. By doing so, we get to have the whole counsel of God, not what I want to teach you guys. I don't dictate what I am going to teach, rather the Scripture does. We've been doing that for the last 14 years and will continue as long as I am here and will continue with the same minded pastor in the future. If he doesn't, you can take him out to desert and leave him there and get a new one.

And there is another style of teaching the Word of God – topical teaching. There are many good Bible teachers who subscribe this method and use the systematic theology to teach the Bible.

In case you don't know the meaning of the Systematic theology, here it is. Systematic theology is a discipline of Christian theology that formulates an orderly, rational, and coherent account of the Christian faith and beliefs. Is it wrong? Absolutely not.

However, there are two major weaknesses of topical teaching with the systematic theological approach. First, a pastor or a Bible teacher can choose his favorite subjects, consequently his congregation does not get the whole counsel of God from His Word. Second, he can bend the text to fit into his theology. Now, he has problems with the Lord by doing so.

The portion of the Scripture we just read can be called "one of the devil's favorite verses," because it can be used out of context to condemn the struggling believers.

If you believe that once you are saved – the Calvinists believe this, no matter whatever you do, you are saved permanently, which is a controversial eternal security of salvation, you will have a hard time swallowing the portion "*if they fall away*" in v6. I am sure that they would insist that that person has never been saved. If so, they have to remove what verse 4 and 5 said.

The Arminianists believe that you can be saved and lose one's salvation each time they sin against the Lord, but they can be saved over and over and over. They also have a major headache with these verses, because verses 4-6 clearly states that it is impossible for a believer who walked away from the Lord by his own choice to come back to Him.

This passage is certainly not teaching that if you commit a sin or sins, you cannot repent and renew the relationship with the Lord. If that is the case, we are totally doomed.

By now, you are completely confused and are thinking, "OK, pastor, make up your mind. You are giving me a headache. Maybe this person is not a born-again believer." If you think so, look at the list again from v4 – "*enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come*"? That's impressive, don't you think???

Do you know why these two theological camps are having a hard time accepting these verses? It is because the text denies their own pre-made theologies. In the Bible, God's sovereignty and human's free will work together beautifully and seamlessly. The infinitely wise God knew what each human would decide with one's free will, all the way to the end of one's life, so He predestined it before the creation of the universe and before the time ever existed. What is so difficult about that? It is obvious that I am not smart enough to complicate the matter like those brilliant theologians. Call me an Arminian Calvinist or a Calvinistic Arminian. I don't care, because I am quite content so long as I can keep close to my Bible.

Back to the danger of backsliding, I don't know where you are spiritually right now. Maybe you are toying with the idea of committing sins because they are enticing. Of

course, they are enticing. Do you think that the devil puts out bait with an ugly gunny sack on it in front of you? The temptation might be a very attractive person who is not your spouse, but gives all the attention to you, or an opportunity to do something that you don't want anyone to know because it is unethical or even illegal.

Don't think that you can go ahead to commit that sin and repent of it later because you know that our God is a forgiving and merciful God. Yes, He is, but you may not come to sense to repent of your sin later. You may just continue to dig deeper in your sins and not return to the Lord. Or you may die before you repent. You are thinking, "Come on, you are using a cheap scare tactic on me." Yes, I am trying to scare the hell out of you so that you wouldn't backslide.

No matter how we want to candy coat it, backsliding is ugly and it is another way to say "disobedience to God".

Listen to me, please. Backsliding starts with our conscientious decision of accommodation. You sort of turn a blind eye to something. Then you give in to it and rationalize it. And then you start making excuses for it and defending it. The next thing you know, you embrace it as a normal lifestyle. But that is not the behavior of a real follower of Jesus. If you disagree with what I just said, you go ahead to look at the face of Jesus who died for your very sin on the cross and say, "I don't care if you died for my sin."

But if you want to finish well in the race of life and live joyfully, if you want God to complete the work He has begun in you, then you need to press on as a follower of Christ. He will give you the strength to do it. But you need to ask for that strength every day.

C. FRUITFULNESS OR FRUITLESSNESS

Hebrews 6:7-8 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8 but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

Have you ever heard someone tell you, "Grow up"? I get those words from my wife from time to time. She doesn't actually say it, but the look on her pretty face says so loud that it hurts my ears. So, I say in my heart, "Stop looking at me with that tone of voice." Do you know what I am talking about, husbands?

The Christian life on earth is not just to have a ticket to heaven. That, in itself is wonderful, but there is more than that. The reason for our existence is to glorify the name of our God and for His pleasure. We are His subject when we committed our lives to Him. I don't mind being God's servant at all. A side effect of being God's servant is going to heaven. It sure beats going to hell and burning eternally, don't you think?

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

This is a sobering warning to all of us. No matter how closely we are walking with the Lord now, we must realize that every step we take is the beginning of a fall. You may think, "I am standing on such a solid theology rock that I cannot fall." Oh, my brother and sister, if you are thinking that, your fall just started. NO ONE IS IMMUNE.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Let the Bible speak to you as the Lord intended. Don't try to bend it to fit into your own theology or interpretation.

2) No one is immune to fall. Keep your eyes on the Lord Jesus and walk circumspectly.