

Checkin' Out My Walk
#17- Consider Your Ways

I Cor. 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is the temple (the very sanctuary) of the Holy Spirit Who lives within you, Whom you have received [as a Gift] from God? You are not your own. You were bought with a price [purchased with a preciousness and paid for, made His own]. So then, honor God *and* bring glory to Him in your body.

The year was 538 BC. Cyrus the Great had conquered Babylon where the Jews had been held captive the last 70 years. (Out of their land = Our Abundant Life)

II Chron. 36:22-23 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who *is* among you of all His people? May the LORD his God *be* with him, and let him go up!

Isa. 44:28 Who says of Cyrus, '*He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."*'

Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6) and Ezra (7-10) lead the captives of Babylon back to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, is of the kingly line. Ezra, descended from Aaron the priest, is a priest. Clearly outlined is the need for the work both of the king to build or rebuild and of the priest to cleanse in accomplishing restoration. Both are essential in the work of restoring someone who has fallen into a carnal, apathetic and "dead" state.

Ezra 1:5 Then rose up the heads of fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

God takes the initiative. No one, after falling into a carnal, apathetic state, would come back to Christ unless God brought him back. When the Israelites went to Babylon, they became a different kind of people. Dr. J. Vernon McGee has pointed out: while they were in Israel they were sheep-keepers, or shepherds. When they went to Babylon they could no longer keep sheep, so they became shop-keepers, or merchants, and some became very successful. They became so prosperous, so lost to materialism, they did not want to go back to Jerusalem even though they were still slaves and exiled from their own land. Many of them refused to return when God opened the door. But the Spirit of God stirred up the hearts of some and made them unsatisfied with material prosperity.

Mere things will never satisfy the deep-seated cry of the human spirit.

Rev. 3:4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments;

Note: Sardis = those who came out; escaping ones

When we feel that crying need, God the Spirit is stirring us up to return and rebuild the things that make for spiritual strength.

I Thess. 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

Phil. 2:13 [Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure *and* satisfaction *and* delight.

He is calling you to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. My Continual Choice

Warning: Hebrews 3:7-12 Do Not Harden Your Heart To The Stirring

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, ⁹ Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. ¹⁰ Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in *their* heart, and they have not known My ways.'

¹¹ So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" ¹² Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

Warning: They lost their inheritance.

Heb. 4:11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

Zerubbabel leads the first group of about 50,000 people from Babylon back to Jerusalem. The Jews who returned to Jerusalem found their capital in ruins, their city walls shattered and their temple a heap of charred, shattered stones.

Refusing to be overwhelmed, this remnant began by:

1. Building An Altar: original temple site in the midst of ruins to restore worship of God.

Our biggest problem isn't the actual problems we face; it's our relationship with God!

My altar is in ruins! If we do not fix our problem with God, we will not find the solution to marital problems, our child's problem, our financial problem, etc. Everyone who wishes to change his life cannot waste anymore time. You must start with your Altar, your relationship with God. As long as it is destroyed, your life will be in ruins.

Note: It wasn't necessary to wait until the temple was completed before offering sacrifices to God. (Broken heart & Contrite spirit)

Note: When I seek the Lord in prayer, submit and yield to Him, and confess my sin, it is like pushing a reset button. When I put first things first, the rest will come back into alignment.

Truth: Begin with worship and surrender. Restoration will follow.

God has sole right to us and the altar is the symbol of our personal relationship to him.

An altar almost invariably involves sacrifice, worship, and praise -- the sacrifice of apprehending the truth, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price"

(I Cor. 6:19-20); the worship of again enjoying a restored relationship, when again the heart is ministered to by the only One who can meet its needs; and the praise of a rejoicing heart.

2. Lay The Foundation Of The Temple.

The work was met with mixed feelings. Ezra 3:11-13:

And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard afar.

Surely during the years of captivity, the elders would have told stories of life in the past and descriptions of Solomon's magnificent temple. As they now stood there looking at what spiritual idolatry and apathy had produced, would they realize it was the result of their lack of spiritual discipline and obedience?

Consider: Ps. 11:3 If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?

Lay The Foundation Again - Make sure the foundations of repentance, confession, prayer, God's Word, obedience and faith are solid.

Have you ever come back to God after a time of coldness and withdrawal -- a captive of sin's power -- with a great sense of joy as the foundations of fellowship were relaid by the Spirit? Yet also with regret for the lost and wasted years?

Tears of joy mingled with tears of sorrow as the people saw the temple being re-laid.

3. Opposition Immediately Develops

The shout awakened the enemies of the Jews who had occupied the land while the Israelites were held captive. It doesn't take long for God's people to grow apathetic, especially when opposition that began as an ominous growl soon became a roar.

Truth: A force is at work in every human heart that immediately rises up to oppose everything God attempts to do.

Note: This Opposition First Appears As Friendly Solicitude. (Satan = Serpent To Deceive)

Ezra 4:1-2 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, "Let us build with you; for we seek your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here." The enemy can masquerade as an angel of light. Their claims are a LIE.

It is not very difficult to say no to an enemy who breathes fiery threats of slaughter.

But when he comes dripping with solicitude and offers to help in your projects, it is very difficult to say no. You need a heart willing to be obedient to the Word of God.

4. Response To Opposition: Ezra 4:3 But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' *houses* of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for

our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."

Satan as the serpent to deceive had failed. God had commanded Israel not to mingle with other nations, or to engage with them in enterprises that concerned the faith. The opposition tries to interject worldly concepts, advice, and methods into the lives of God's people. These are to be rejected as they are contrary to the work of the Spirit of God. The world reflects the spirit of the devil, "Advance yourself. Do this for your own glory. Use religious ways to achieve self-satisfaction."

5. The Veil Of Friendship Offered Quickly Turns To Hatred. (Satan = Lion To Devour)
Ezra 4:4-5 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

6. Success of Opposition: Ezra 5 & 6 tell the success of the enemy in stopping the work of rebuilding the temple. By deliberately attempting to frustrate these people, by mocking them and taunting them, they discouraged Israel from doing work that God had commanded. These "friends" even used legal means to undermine Israel's authority and right to build. Paul wrote the Galatians, "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit." (Gal. 5:17)

The Jews had left Persia with much enthusiasm and zeal. No doubt they assumed they would return to their land, quickly rebuild the temple and the city, and then turn their attention to their land and houses. When they found completing the temple would not be as quick and easy as they had supposed, they threw up their hands and turned their attention and energies to building their own homes. They gave up because the task was more difficult than they first thought. To turn their attention to their own homes was not that difficult (really wanted to build their own homes anyway). It appeared safer and easier to put off work in Jerusalem.

How little it takes to cause God's people to stumble.

Listen to the words of the writer to the Hebrews:

Heb. 12:4 You have not yet resisted to the point of bloodshed in your struggle against sin.

They have not come up against an immovable object; they have encountered a little resistance. They have the assurance of God, the decree of the king, and the means provided to accomplish their task. However, they became self-indulgent and self-absorbed and pursued activities to please themselves. Israel, however, got used to life without the Temple. Sixteen years passed and the temple lay half-completed, the foundation overrun with weeds and grass. They stood as a mute reminder of the Jews' failure to take care of God's house. Worship ceased.

God sent 2 prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to move the people's hearts to finish the task.

Consider Your Ways:

1. The Temple is in ruins.
2. You are neglecting the worship of God.
3. Your priorities are misplaced. You have drifted from the truth that God is first.
4. Your ways are an embarrassment to God and a blemish on His reputation.

Haggai's message was blunt. He pulled no punches and wasted no words.

Haggai spoke like a foreman on a construction project.

With a hardhat and tool belt, walking around the construction site, he bellowed out orders.

1. Put God First In Your Life

He exposes the hypocrisy and unbelief

Haggai 1:2-4 "Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built.'" *Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?"*

a. Excuses - Defending our inactivity

They intended to build God's house, but just hadn't got around to it yet. If you were to ask them about it, they would say, "I'm all for building the Temple. It is a great cause. But we need to take care of our own families first. Times are hard. Jobs are scarce. We need to pray about it some more. We will eventually build it, but not now."

Billy Sunday defined an excuse as "the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie." It is always easy to make excuses when you don't want to obey God. We can always find rational justification for not doing what God wants us to do: The time is not right. I've got family responsibilities. My kids need me now. When things settle down at work, then I can do something.

The first step to putting first things first is to admit our responsibility

b. Evidence - How could they doubt it was God's will for them to build the temple and restore worship? God moved Cyrus to commission them to return. He gave them money and materials. By stopping the work, the Jews were admitting they had no faith in God's Word or in God's power to perform it. When their circumstances actually became worse due to the enemy, they doubted God and the dependability of His Word.

c. Evasion - They were terribly inconsistent. It wasn't time to work on God's temple, but it was time to build their own houses. They were building houses fit for kings.

2. Cease Being Selfish

Closely aligned with excuse making is a selfish mindset that permeates everything. Haggai challenged the people's selfish behavior. "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" Paneled houses represented the finishing touches. Their homes were not "in process." No weeds were growing around their unfinished foundations. Their homes were complete while the Temple remained nonexistent.

Consider: If I give no thought to how I am living, I will naturally live for myself.

The bent of our hearts and is always toward selfishness. Like William Cowper, the hymn writer and pastor, penned: "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." That is what happens when we don't persistently and consistently seek God first.

3. Believe God's Promises

Haggai 1:5-6;9 Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!

⁶ "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough;

You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm;

And he who earns wages, Earns wages *to put* into a bag with holes." "You looked for much, but indeed *it came to* little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD

of hosts. "Because of My house that *is in ruins*, while every one of you runs to his own house.

a. Consider your ways - give careful thought to

b. You are focused on the things you choose instead of your spiritual life.

c. Your own efforts and strength are in vain.

4. Honor God's Name

Haggai 1:7-8 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! ⁸ Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD.

When God is not first we are indifferent to His glory—His fame and His reputation being spread. The chief business of every Christian is to bring glory to God.

5. Obey God's Commands

Haggai 1:12-15 all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the LORD. ¹³ Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, spoke the LORD's message to the people, saying, "I am with you, says the LORD." ¹⁴ So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel... the spirit of Joshua... and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God,

Commitment to the task begins with joy and zeal for God. Then a little opposition or rejection comes my way. Perhaps God fails to bless me in the way and within the time frame I expected. I thought life would be better. I become more and more self-absorbed, less and less active in the things of God. I become disillusioned and bitter. I lack endurance.

Have I pinned my hopes on temporary things instead of eternal realities?

Discouragement can be a red flag to pause and consider my priorities.

God Is Calling You > Be Conformed To The Image Of Jesus Christ