

Checkin' Out My Walk
#19 - Sardis - All Aboard! Let Us Be Carried Forward

Sardis, the Reformation Church from 1517-1790, means those who came out; who took the way of escape > the remnant.

Consider: Will I take the way of escape God commands for spiritual growth and maturity?

Haggai challenged us to consider our ways: Put God First, Cease Being Selfish, Believe God's Promises, Honor His Name and Obey His Commands.

The Reformation Church leaders declared "The just shall live by faith." This was the vital and critical first step to demonstrate man's need for a Savior to forgive and justify them. However, Protestantism soon politicized itself and became a national religion (state churches), thus making the same errors as the Church it had left. The denominational churches became a spiritual graveyard.

We start our journey by faith in Christ (justification: foundation is laid), but we can be diverted onto a perverted (eyes off Jesus) path for sanctification. We can become trapped by religion, rules, performance-itis, in an effort to please God and receive His approval.

Do we not realize our spiritual life is a battlefield, a preparation for a greater life to come? At the moment of justification, all are entered in the race for the prize and are commanded to walk in the spirit. The "reformation" we need is to allow the Holy Spirit to complete the work that was started in us. Allow Him to mature us and "grow us up into the fullness of Jesus Christ."

Rev. 3:2-3 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, (my maturity and spiritual growth?) for I have not found your works perfect (complete, mature) before God. Remember therefore how you have received (by faith) and heard; hold fast and repent (change your mind; turn and continue by faith).

Warning: Wake Up! Pay Attention!

A.W. Tozer: The average Christian is NOT Christ-like and lives a sub-Christian life.

Do not grow comfortable with your present spiritual state. There is always more ground to gain. Submit to the Holy Spirit whose transforming power will complete the work in you.

Phil. 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ; (Promise> Reckon> Surrender>Thank Him)

Jesus Christ issues the same exhortation to each church. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

It takes more than physical ears to hear the voice of God; it requires a receptive heart.

Heb. 3:7-8 Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.

Paul, in his letter to the Hebrews, states 5 admonitions to "heed God's Word" and the sad spiritual consequences that result if we do not.

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| 1. Heb. 2:1-4 | Drifting From The Word > | Neglect |
| 2. Heb. 3:7-4:13 | Doubting The Word > | Doubting |
| 3. Heb. 5:11-6:20 | Dullness Toward The Word > | Sluggishness |
| 4. Heb. 10:26-39 | Despising The Word > | Willfulness |
| 5. Heb. 12:14-29 | Defying The Word > | Refusing To Hear |

Sequence: 1. If we do not listen to God's Word and really HEAR it, we start to DRIFT. Neglect always leads to drifting.

2. As we drift, we begin to DOUBT the Word. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God.
3. Our heart begins to harden which leads to spiritual sluggishness which produces DULLNESS toward the Word. We become dull of hearing = lazy listeners!
4. This leads to a despiseful attitude toward the Word to the extent we willfully disobey.
5. This gradually develops into a defiant attitude.

Paul addresses these 5 exhortations to people:

- a. Who are truly born again, not mere professors.

Heb. 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,

Heb. 4:14 We have a great High Priest in Heaven

Heb. 6:4 have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,

- b. Who have been persecuted because of their faith (Heb. 10:32-34; 13:13-14)
- c. Who have faithfully ministered to the needs of others who had suffered (Heb. 6:10)
- d. Who were being seduced by teachers of false doctrine (Heb. 13:9)
- e. Who were in danger of forgetting the true Word their first leaders, now dead, had taught them (Heb. 13:7)

Temptation: Their difficulties are tempting them to return to the Jewish law and religion to escape persecution. The Christian life was proving to be very difficult.

Red Alert: These believers were at a standstill spiritually and in danger of going backward (Heb. 5:12ff).

- a. Some had forsaken the regular worship services. (Heb. 10:25)
- b. They were not making spiritual progress. (Heb. 6:1)

Heb. 6:12 We desire that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Background: Israel wanted to go back to Egypt. As a result, an entire generation failed to inherit what God had promised. They were safely delivered out of Egypt, but they never enjoyed the promised rest in Canaan. You and I can make the SAME MISTAKE.

Lessons From King Asa - II Chronicles 14-16

1. King Asa ruled for 41 years.
2. Asa did *what was* good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as *did* his father David.
3. The first 10 years of his reign were marked by peace. He used the time of peace to prepare for future conflicts.

- a. He urged and emphasized to the people: seek the LORD.
 - b. He led a national reformation: He cleansed the land of idolatry.
 - c. He fortified the land by building defense cities and assembling a 580,000 men army.
4. When the Egyptian army attacked Judah, Asa said of Judah > "those who have no power."
Egypt's army was ~ 2x larger than Judah's army. Asa's army had no chariots.
- a. Asa called on the LORD during time of trouble. He attacked the enemy "in the name of the LORD of Hosts" in order to bring glory to God for the victory.
 - b. The LORD soundly defeated the Egyptian army. Judah's men plundered the cities and brought back an immense amount of spoils.
 - c. The Egyptians didn't attack Judah again for almost 300 years.
5. The LORD sent Azariah the prophet to Asa's victorious army to give them a message of encouragement and warning.
- a. After victories, seek the Lord, obey and trust Him, and be strong in the Lord.
6. They used this time of peace to prepare for future conflicts. They were exhorted to continue the work, build the nation and serve the Lord faithfully.
- a. He expelled the shrine male prostitutes.
 - b. He removed his own grandmother from being the queen mother because she had made an obscene idol to Asherah.
 - c. He repaired the altar of sacrifice.
 - d. He called the people to worship the LORD and renew their covenant. Renew our devotion
 - e. They had peace for another 20 years.
7. Asa's Rebellion: Apparently King Asa became careless in his walk with the Lord.
- a. The LORD sent Baasah, King of Israel, to war against Asa.
 - b. Asa, in his unbelief, turns to politics for help. He gave the dedicated treasures from the temple to Ben-hadad, king of Syria, and entered into a pact with a pagan nation.
 - c. Asa insisted Ben-hadad break his treaty with Israel.
 - d. God is displeased with King Asa. He sends the prophet Hanani to rebuke Asa. If you had relied on the LORD, you would have defeated both Israel and Syria. The results of your disobedience: (1) Judah gained a few towns. (2) The Lord's treasury was robbed.
- Consider: All the resource God gives for victory are stolen by the enemy.
(3) You are in a sinful alliance with Syria. (4) Syria became a constant problem to Judah.
- Problem: Asa's heart was divided - one day trusting the Lord and the next day trusting in the arm of the flesh.
- Note: A perfect heart isn't a sinless heart but a heart wholly yielded to the Lord and fully trusting Him.
8. Asa revealed the wickedness of his heart by becoming angry, rejecting the prophet's message, and putting him in prison. He brutally oppressed the people who opposed him.

9. God gave Asa time to repent, but he refused.

In the 39th year of his reign, God afflicted him with a disease in his feet.

10. He turned his back on the Lord and refused to confess his sins and seek Jehovah, but he turned for help to his physicians. Two years later, he died.

Lesson: Asa made a good beginning and lived a life of faith, but when it came to his final years, he rebelled against the Lord. Spiritual progress stopped.

Remember: Paul emphasizes MAKING SPIRITUAL PROGRESS in Hebrews.

Marks of Spiritual Immaturity: Hebrews 5:11-14

1. Heb. 5:11 You have become Dull Of Hearing.

Dull = Slothful; condition of spiritual apathy and laziness that prevents spiritual development

a. These believers started on their "backward journey" by:

Drifting from the Word (Heb. 2:1-4) and Doubting the Word (Heb. 3:7-4:13)

b. Now, they are "dull of hearing:" unable to listen to the Word, receive it and act on it.

Contrast: I Thess. 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

2. Inability To Share: Heb. 5:12a For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God;

The ability to share spiritual truth is a mark of maturity.

Instead of helping others to grow, these believers were in need of learning again the simple teachings of the Christian life; a 2nd childhood!

3. Baby Food Diet > Heb. 5:12b-13 You have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. Milk = first principles of the oracles of God; refers to what Jesus did on earth > His birth, life, teaching, death burial and resurrection. We begin our Christian life on the basis of His finished work on earth.

Meat = What Jesus is doing in heaven; His ministry as our High Priest - We GROW in the Christian life based on the basis of His unfinished work in Heaven.

4. Unskillful In Using The Word > Heb. 5:14 Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. As we feed on the Word of God and apply it in daily life, our inner "spiritual senses" get their exercise and become strong and keen. The nation of Israel under Moses lacked this discernment and failed to claim its promised inheritance.

These believers are about to make the same mistake. They needed to go forward and claim God's blessing (His rest) or they will go backward and wander about aimlessly.

Warning: Keep Making Progress or you are an open target for the enemy to attack and destroy.

Preacher: "Betweeners:" saved by the blood but not enjoying newness of resurrection life.

God calls us to "Go On To Maturity" - GROW UP in Christ! God is not honored by our arrested development. Mediocrity is NOT the highest Jesus offers.

Spiritual growth is NOT automatic. Spiritual growth begins with a basic discontent with your present condition. You must be intentional, desiring and diligent.

Warning: Mediocre Christians will resist the call to spiritual maturity.

Heb. 6:1 Therefore, having left (once and for all) the elementary *principles* (ABC'S) of the teaching of Christ, let us go on to perfection.

Let us be carried forward. God enables us to progress as we yield to Him, receive His Word and act on it. He is emphatic: There is a peril in not progressing!

Don't settle for the "creed of contentment." Apprehended Bible truths will awaken your desire for the Holy Spirit to continue working in you and move you forward.

God's Word conveys strong appeals and commands for us to earnestly desire spiritual maturity. Common words and phrases: be diligent to enter; strive or agonize for the prize; mortify the deeds of the flesh; pursue holiness; be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Yet many born-again believers put on the brakes at the risk of being perceived as "fanatic."

Question: Am I a "fanatic" who desires to continue maturing spiritually until He calls me home or am I guilty of merely "nibbling" at the truth of God's Word, content to be a common, mediocre Christian?

Paul's discussion in Philippians 3 should challenge us with his earnest desire to press forward and to become a special kind of Christian - not mediocre who will resist the call to maturity.

Tozer: Many have the bland assurance that because they can quote the text of Scripture they must have the experience. This strange belief that assumes because we can quote chapter and verse we possess the content and experience is a grave hindrance to spiritual growth. "I think it is one of the deadliest, most chilling breezes that ever blew across the church of God."

Average Christians are NOT willing to obey the call to spiritual growth and maturity. God will not compromise with anyone over the issue of disobedience to truth He has revealed to them. Any who knowingly refuses to obey will be brought to a distinct halt in their spiritual life. People are sitting all around in the church, just as though the axle has broken, and not making any progress for years. They are stopped by disobedience.

Truth: It is possible to never mature and remain a spiritual infant for life. Years of wasted service will only produce a pile of ashes at the judgment seat.

I Thess. 5:24 He who calls you is faithful. The One who calls you to a life of righteousness is the One who will live that life of righteousness in you and through you by your consent.

II Chron. 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart *is* loyal to Him.

Spurgeon: When your will is God's will, you will have your will.

Let us be carried forward: Gain All of Jesus Christ & spiritual maturity.