

Session Three

Climbing Higher

THE ASCENDING LIFE

God's Golden Stairway to Glory

PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The Principle of Repentance and Faith



Stepping through a doorway

After having recognized our imperfections and the nature of sin and having confessed it all to the Lord, the next step up God's Golden Stairway to Glory is to DO something about it. What we must do is to repent and believe the Gospel. Perhaps you think this is going back to the beginning of our Christian lives. In a way it is; but we must remember that when we came to Christ in repentance and faith that was just the beginning of a LIFE OF CONTINUAL REPENTANCE AND FAITH!

Repentance and faith are like two sides of the same coin, one negative, the other positive. Or it may be likened to stepping through a doorway from one room into another. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, preached the necessity for repentance as recorded in Luke 3:7-14: ⁷ *He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' ⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'* ¹⁰ *And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?"* ¹¹ *And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."* ¹² *Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"* ¹³ *And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do."* ¹⁴ *Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation and be content with your wages."*

Jesus picked up this theme when He began his public ministry. Mark 1:14-15 says, ¹⁴ *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,* ¹⁵ *and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

Later, Jesus re-emphasized the need for repentance. In Luke 13:1-5 we read: ¹ *There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.* ² *And he answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?' ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'*

The question of why bad things happen to “good” people has been around for a long time. Whether it was the violence of Pilate or the collapse of a stone tower, the conventional wisdom said that they must have been terribly bad sinners for such awful things to happen to them; but Jesus implies that we are all sinners worthy of death from whatever cause and, in fact, we will all die, but the only way to avoid perishing is to repent.

Repentance means turning away from the trouble, whatever the cause may be. The word means literally, “to turn around, or to turn away.” In military terms it is expressed in the command, “About, face!” It also means “to change the mind about something” (about sin, self, God, salvation, the Bible, or the church, among other things). Changing the mind includes changing attitudes, desires, values. It means to turn away from sin no matter what form it may take and to decide to reject it and to accept what God says in His Word about sin or any other subject.

Repentance requires action. This is seen in the preaching of John, the baptizer, who called on those who repent to share with those in need, to deal honestly with others, and not to be greedy or accuse others falsely. It also means a decision of the will not to repeat a negative action or attitude but to replace it with something positive.

Should repentance be public? Confession need not be public unless the sin was public; repentance need not be detailed publicly, either; HOWEVER, to acknowledge that one has sinned and that one has decided to do something about it publicly is a powerful motivation for sticking to one's decision.

Christians ought to set the example for non-Christians in being willing to come forward when invited to do so to acknowledge that they are imperfect, that they have sinned, that they have decided to turn away from the sin. When sinners see Christians repenting, they will be more likely to repent. (This is what REVIVAL is all about!)

The other side of repentance is faith. Repentance is negative, like leaving something behind. Faith means getting re-oriented toward God, ourselves and others (Heb. 11:1-6). It is positive. It is like

stepping through a doorway out of one room and into another or it is like turning your back to anything which is harmful to you or others and walking away from it.

Faith is recognition that God exists and that He is good (Heb. 11:1, 6). It is assurance/conviction about things not seen. The visible world is made up of particles not seen, but they are real, like molecules and atoms and sub-atomic particles (vs. 3). It is being sure that what we have hoped for (our salvation, God's love and grace, etc.) is reality. Once we experience this reality in Jesus, we have the assurance that He is real and we can depend on Him. Faith means trust and commitment.

What are the elements of faith? It seems that there are four elements to biblical faith.

First there is an intellectual assent to truth – belief -- about God, ourselves, sin, the Bible, Jesus, etc. This, I think, is what most people think is the meaning of the word; but even demons have this intellectual-conviction-of-truth level of faith (James 2:19) so it is not saving faith.

The second element of saving faith includes a commitment to live by the truth as it is revealed in God's Word and by trusting in God and His Word. It is ACTING on what we dare to believe to be true. I can believe that a chair will hold me up if I sit in it, but it does not become faith until I actually commit my weight to it. I may believe that an airplane will take me to New York or some other destination in the world, but it does not become faith until I am actually on board and trust the pilot and the crew to take me to my destination.

In the third place there is an expectation that God will respond to our commitment to Him and that His response will be favorable and good. This expectation is based on the promises of His Word, like John 3:16, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.* "Believes" is not just intellectual assent to truth but a commitment to that truth expecting that God will honor His Word and fulfill His promise to provide the believer with "everlasting life."

Fourth, there is the element of praise and thanksgiving to God for His response even before we see it! (*"Believe that you **have** received it and it will be yours"* - Mark 11:24).

Faith is NOT a leap in the dark; it is assurance and conviction that we can trust God to do what is best for us. It does not ignore logic or reasoning, but goes beyond it! It is not blind! Evidence for the existence of God is found in nature (Ps. 19:1-6, Rom. 1:19-20), in the second law of thermodynamics (concerning balance and equilibrium in nature), in the expanding universe, in the nature of matter and energy and the relation between the two -- all these factors support faith in God as Creator, Designer and Planner. It is more intellectually honest to believe in the existence of God than to believe that all things came into existence by chance. Furthermore, if

God IS, then He is WORTHY OF OUR WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE--this is why many refuse to admit His existence – because they do not want to worship or obey anything above themselves!

We cannot KNOW God except as He reveals Himself to us -- as is true of all knowledge of persons. We can only know as much of each other as we are willing to reveal to others. I can stand in front of you for hours, but you would not really know me. You might weigh me and measure me or note the color of my eyes or skin, but you would still not know the real me, my personality, my attitudes, my mind or my spirit. You would only know these aspects of me as I reveal them to you by my words and my actions, and then your knowledge might be incomplete because I might hide some of them from you.

God has revealed Himself in Creation, in history and to certain chosen people, and especially through the Jewish people, but supremely in the person of JESUS CHRIST. Philip asked Jesus to *show us the Father and that will be enough for us.* Jesus answered, *Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves* (John 14:8-11).

What are the results of faith?

First, God accepts us as we are, but with hope that we will improve! Consider the story of the prodigal son and the waiting father. The father allowed the son to take his inheritance *before* he (the father) died and gave him the freedom to squander it until he had nothing left and was desperate to return to his father's house as a hired servant and not as a son. When the waiting father saw the desperate son come down the road, he rushed to him and rejoiced to receive him back as a beloved son even though he no longer had any privileges in the family. Nothing could change his biological and genetic position as a son.

Our relationship with God by faith results in our NEW position before God in Christ accepted, cleansed, clothed with His righteousness, sons and daughters of God! It results in God's LIFE flowing into us and through us to bless others! It means that God lives in us by the presence of His Holy Spirit so that God's POWER is made available to us for overcoming temptation, for victory in trials and suffering, and to minister in His Name to carry out His will, plan and purpose for our lives!

Our relationship with God by faith also results in the ability to sense His will and to obey and

follow it even though it may lead to suffering or possibly even to death. Those who suffer persecution because of their faith in Jesus are empowered to persevere in spite of suffering because their faith strengthens them to endure for His sake and for His glory. (See Hebrews 11:35b-40.)

Conclusion: This is a message for both believers and unbelievers. Being born-again requires both repentance and faith, but so does Christian growth! This is an essential key to the ascending life, climbing up God's Golden Stairway to Glory!