

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

BABY STEPS

As children are born into our homes, we understand that the process ahead is a long one which will take great patience and understanding. We learn that certain things cannot be helped, such as waking at all hours of the night for feeding and changing diapers. We take special care in the formula we use, the environment in which we place our little ones, and the things to which they are exposed. As they grow, we are patient with them as they learn to walk, begin to eat solid foods, and the most difficult act of all, potty training.

We watch our children grow with joy, continually loving them, helping them to correct their mistakes, making sure they are growing properly, and being incredibly patient as they learn the manners of life. Sometimes we cry, most times we laugh, we often get excited, but through it all we know that life is not easy and that the process of growth is a long one. Living the Christian life, dear reader, is no different.

Jesus explains entering the family of God as being a new birth in John 3:3-5. Christians are born of water and the Spirit. Seeing as how water baptism is the only water connected with the church and salvation, then we can easily determine that the new birth about which Jesus speaks being of water, is baptism for the remission of sins (cf. Romans 6:3,4; Acts 2:38). Being born of the Spirit speaks of complying with the Spirit's revealed terms. The Holy Spirit has revealed the Word to us (I Corinthians 2:9-13; Ephesians 3:3-4). Jesus says we are born of the Spirit (John 3:5). Peter writes that we are "*born again...by the word of God*" (I Peter 1:23). Thus, it becomes clear that the Spirit, by means of the word, begets Christians when they comply with the terms therein revealed, being baptized into the family of God (Acts 2:41,47; I Corinthians 12:13).

When one is "born again" he is described as being a "babe" in Christ (Hebrews 5:13; I Peter 2:2). It is now time to begin the growth process. A Christian's growth is guided by our heavenly Father through the pattern of His word (Hebrews 8:5; II Timothy 3:16-17). Our Father, then, watches with patience as we grow into adulthood, realizing the difficulties we face, and the present need to be loved and chastened, "*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*" (Hebrews 12:6).

As we grow, we sometimes fall, "*for all have sinned*" (Romans 3:23; cf. I John 1:8), but we get up, wipe the sinful dust from our body by repenting, and we continue to press forward by "*walking in the light*" (I John 1:7,9). Sometimes we make mistakes, sometimes we cause heartbreak, and other times we simply act stubbornly, yet through it all we are not separated from the love of God or from the love of our brothers and sisters (Romans 8:35,39). Finally, after many struggles and discouragements, we become "of full age" and we are able to eat strong meat (Hebrews 5:14). IT is then that we look to our "younger" brothers and sisters, those who are but babes, and with patience help them grow, laughing with them, crying with them, and even becoming aggravated with them. But we remember that we ourselves were once but babes, in need of milk, and even no, as those who are full grown, we still make mistakes and are in need of being chastised.

The next time you see your brethren falling short of God's glory, remember the weakness of their flesh, remember the patience and love that has been expressed toward us, remember your struggles through this burdensome life, and, above all, remember

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

GATHERING IN THE SUMMERTIME

Text: _____

I. The _____
of Gathering in the Summertime

Notes:

II. The _____
of Gathering in the Summertime

Notes:

III. The _____ of
Gathering in the Summertime

Notes:

IF AS A CHRISTIAN I FAIL...

Text: _____

I. I Fail My _____

Notes:

II. I Fail My _____

Notes:

III. I Fail My _____

Notes:

that we are to help one another, not despise, reject, and shun one another. Sure, there are times when the withdrawal of fellowship is necessary (Ephesians 5:11; II Thessalonians 3:6; I Corinthians 5), but this is not that about which I am writing. I am writing about our brothers and sisters who are trying to be faithful with each step, yet are often hindered by the bumps in the road. Remember, *“God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him”* (Romans 5:8-9).

-Roger A. Scully, Jr.

CARRIED ANY DONKEYS LATELY?

An old fable that has been passed down for generations tells about an elderly man who was traveling with a boy and a donkey. As they walked through a village, the man was leading the donkey and the boy was walking behind. The townspeople said the old man was a fool for not riding, so to please them he climbed up on the animal’s back. When they came to the next village, the people said the old man was cruel to let the child walk while he enjoyed the ride. So, to please them, he got off and set the boy on the animal’s back and continued on his way. In the third village, people accused the child of being lazy for making the old man walk, and the suggestion was made that they both ride. So the man climbed on and they set off again. In the fourth village, the townspeople were indignant at the cruelty to the donkey because he was made to carry two people. The frustrated man was last seen carrying the donkey down the road.

We smile, but this story makes a good point: we can’t please everybody, and if we try we end up carrying a heavy burden. Well-meaning Christians may offer us advice, and most of it is valuable. But when we try to do everything other believers want us to do, we can easily become frustrated and confused. That’s why we need to remember that the One we must please above all others is Christ. And we do that by obeying God’s Word. Carried any donkeys lately? You don’t have to if you’re trying to please Jesus.

“Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

CATASTROPHIC CHRISTIANITY

The expectations of God are all too clear. There are simple statements such as faithfulness, overcome, obedience, righteousness, etc., that all illustrate the fact that God wants His people to adhere closely and strictly to His will. The task is great, but the benefits are worth it. Christianity truly is the greatest life a person can choose to live. There is, however, a way that Christianity can turn catastrophic. You see, the life of a Christian was designed by God for the faithful, and it even included contingencies for the soul that has lost its way and desires to return. What, though, about the soul that loses his/her faith, never to return. That truly is catastrophic. The person is still God's child, bought and purchased by Christ's blood, but no longer do they believe, and no longer do they obey. They are but a shell of their former selves, and thus their souls are lost.

The writer of Hebrews provided a strict warning of the danger of the soul, who once knew the blessings of Christianity, but lose their faith and reject the very sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4-6).

There was the obvious context in which this was written given the great temptation these Hebrew Christians had to return back to the rudiments of Judaism. However, the broader application is quite apparent. Here is a soul who has made the conscious decision to pick up a life in Christ and displace himself once again into the world of sin. This is an individual who has drunk from the cooling and refreshing waters of Christianity, and now wants to return to the tepid and stagnate waters of sin. Observing such a sad scenario, we are compelled to ask two questions: (1) why would a person make such a decision, and (2) how can such a choice be prevented?

First, consider the reasoning behind such a catastrophe. The monstrosity of this mistake can only be understood by a Christian who knows the blessings found in Christ. The world sees nothing unusual with a person stepping outside of what they view to be a narrow and stringent lifestyle void of meaning and returning to a life that makes sense. However, to the Christian, such a decision represents the epitome of bad and faulty reasoning. Such a decision must likely come down to one of two reasonings: either, (1) there is something more appealing about the world than the church, or (2) there is something less threatening about the world than the church. The first line of reasoning represents a fault with the individual. There is little that can be said or done to convince a person that Christ's way is better when for one reason or another it simply does not appeal to them. We must pray for them, encourage them, and try to teach them; but ultimately this problem resides with self and must be settled by self. The second line of reasoning, though, represents a possible breach of trust and fellowship. Perhaps they witnessed un-Christian behavior, hypocrisy, infighting, or other disastrous practices in the local congregation of which they were a part. Christianity is appealing, but when Christians do not act like Christians, then that shines a bad light on Christianity and can potentially repel souls rather than reach them. This fault must be corrected in order to shine forth true Christianity to the glory of God as commanded by Jesus (Matthew 5:16ff). Whatever, though, is the ultimate reason or excuse a person has for forsaking Christ and returning to the world, it is catastrophic to their lives and to their souls, and we must take all precautionary steps we can to prevent such from happening.

Ultimately, though, while knowing the reason can be helpful, the question that must be asked and answered is, how can we prevent this from happening, and how can we win those back to whom it has already happened? Brother Winfred Claiborne offered three suggestions that he believed the Bible supported in doing just that. First, he said we must listen to the right voices. If we will open our ears to the truth of God provided in His word, and forsake the lies presented by the world, then we will never fall prey to those lies that ultimately could lead us back into sin. Second, he said we should learn from the past. There are countless examples from scripture and from the modern era of those who have fallen prey to the temptations of the world whose lives have ended up in absolute wickedness and depravity, which illustrate the danger spoken of in Hebrews 6. Then third, he said we should look to proper examples. There are heroes of the faith that provide the course that should be pursued by every child of God, but ultimately look to Jesus as the greatest example of all. We can enjoy eternity with Him if we will follow Him. And while other points could undoubtedly be mentioned, these three seem to make the case well.

We have a personal interest in the pursuits of our souls and in the pursuits of others. We are brethren who want to walk together in fellowship in the here and now, but we must pursue the great fellowship that will exist in the there and then. Protect yourself, your family, and your friends from falling prey to a catastrophic Christianity that will damage the glory shown to God and will damage their eternities.

-Andy Brewer