



To Grow, Or Not To Grow

By Randall F. Matheny

"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62)." The proficient ploughman has the proper completion of his task in mind, and other than to have begun well, is not concerned with what lies behind. To dwell on things past distorts perception of the present, retards growth and accomplishment, and makes the end result of our pilgrimage on earth unnecessarily uncertain. Paul was determined not to allow things past to distract or divert him from achieving the all important goal of his life (Phil. 3:12-16) and he encourages all Christians to be of the same mind as he. He was a goal-setter for whom every minor goal was a step toward the greatest of all goals. Each Christian must also be a goal-setter, for the one who would go to heaven cannot allow his life to be governed by chance.

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Take a moment to read Hebrews 5:11 through 6:6, and observe the following points.

First, lack of attention to inspired teaching retards spiritual growth and results in a condition of perpetual spiritual childhood, which if widespread enough would completely rob the church and the world of desperately

was not lack of proper teaching, but that they were neither listening to, nor using, what was being taught. Every

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character and qualifications necessary to fill an ever growing role in the church and encourage others to do the same.

Third, Hebrews 6:1-6

declares the absolute necessity of growing beyond the "first principles" of Christianity. Failure to do so exposes the Christian to the possibility of falling into such a state of apostasy that repentance and faithfulness are no longer personal concerns. This tragedy (see 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Heb. 10:26-31) can only be avoided by diligent, personal study and application of the word of God (2 Tim. 2:15).

needed teachers of the gospel. This is especially important when the need for church leadership is considered, for too often it is blamed on that slippery character "opportunity" that many men have failed to grow spiritually, and when leaders are needed there are none to be found. This condition occurs where "chance" has been the chief teacher. Concrete, objective, Biblical training must be provided and participated in so that at least some Christians are qualified, equipped and motivated to teach and to lead. Second, the problem with the those addressed in Hebrews 5

Every Christian is valuable to Christ's mission through His church. It is our personal responsibility to be certain we are trained, qualified, and

motivated to serve at every opportunity according to the abilities God has given each of us (Mat. 25:15; 1 Pet. 4:11). Let us not leave our spiritual development to "chance," or chances are we will not develop at all.

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On to Perfection

By Randall F. Matheny

The possibility of apostasy (falling away from Christ and the faith) is real and must be understood Biblically if the church is to remain strong and vital (see 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Heb. 6:1-6). When Christians become unfaithful they return to association with a world that is without Christ and which is void of spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 2:2-22). Examining the Bible to find out why people become unfaithful, and discovering what may be done to help prevent unfaithfulness from occurring, will help us all in arriving at a solution.

Few would argue that all apostasy does not have its roots in ignorance of the word of God (Hos. 4:1-7), which leads naturally to an inordinate love of the world apart from God and an esteem of created things above the Creator (1 Jn. 2:15-17; Rom. 1:18-32). When one's affections are set on things below, rather than upon things above (Col. 3:1-5), the chances of being tempted and drawn away by

lust (Jas. 1:13-17) are multiplied proportionately. Since the course of this disintegration is identifiable, it becomes avoidable and inexcusable. Those who fall away from the faith do so in spite of all that God has done, and all that He has prepared, to keep them faithful.

It must become a priority for all who are baptized into Christ to set a course that will strengthen their faith and remain on it throughout life (2

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Tim. 4:6-8). Establishing good, consistent Bible study habits (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 3:14-15; 2 Tim. 2:15), coupled with a firm commitment not to willfully forsake any assembly of the church are essential first steps. Respect for authority ordained by God in the church (Mat. 28:18; 1 Tim. 3:15), civil society (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), and home (Eph. 6:1-3; 1 Pet. 3:1-7) is another characteristic of the faithful. Those who fail to submit to proper, godly authority fall away and are condemned (2 Pet. 2:9-13). The Christian who would remain faithful unto death will also seek out the most faithful (not neces-

sarily the most popular or most visible) Christians as examples to follow. Every Christian must provide a good example and pattern to be followed by others (1 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 2:7-8; 1 Pet. 2:11-17), for we all are being watched by someone. Finally, every Christian must seek to be involved in the work of the church (Eph. 2:10). Do not wait to be asked to serve, but take the initiative as Jesus intends for all His disciples to do (Lk. 9:23). Every Christian has something to offer in terms of service (Rom. 12:4-8), and the Lord requires of us according to the ability that He has given each of us (Mat. 25:15). When every member is involved the church is edified (Eph. 4:11-16), but when too many are "out of service" the entire church suffers (1 Cor. 12:14-26). People who are not busy for the Lord are at risk to become troublesome, meddlesome busybodies (2 Thes. 3:10-15; 1 Tim. 5:13) who ultimately become unfaithful (1 Tim. 5:15). The old axiom, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is Biblically sound in it's meaning. "Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58)."

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The Importance of Baptism

By Randall F. Matheny

Perhaps the most powerful and compelling argument set forth in the New Testament on the essential nature of baptism, second only to it being a command of Jesus (Mat. 28:19-20), comes in its association with His death, burial and resurrection. Paul sets forth in Romans 6:3-11 the following points: (1) Baptism is into the death of Jesus, (2) it is a burial (*baptidzo* means to "immerse," never to sprinkle or pour) from which an individual is raised by God, (3) newness of life (being born again) follows baptism, (4) it is in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection, (5) in baptism our "old man" (body of sin) is crucified with Christ, (6) only then are we freed from sin, (7) and only then are we "...*alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" The Bible student can clearly see by this comparison that the obedience of faith manifested in baptism is of no less importance to the sinner than the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus with which it is associated. The very power of the crucifixion of Christ is brought to bear on behalf of the sinner when he is baptized into Christ. Paul's Spirit inspired mastery of logic is withering to the false doctrine of salvation before, or apart

from baptism. Baptism cannot be viewed as a work of human merit, but only as a precious, obedient privilege to be desired and embraced by all who would love Jesus.

Note that for each of the preceding positive points there are possibilities of seven negatives: (1) Apart from baptism man is apart from and out of the crucified Savior (also Gal. 3:27), (2) one who has not died with Christ cannot be raised by God, (3) newness of life cannot be enjoyed by the one not baptized (also Jn. 3:3-5), (4) nor may one be raised in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection, (5) having not obeyed from the heart one remains in the body of sin and a servant of sin (also Rom. 6:16-17, 23), (6) not being freed from sin one remains in bondage to it, (7) remaining dead in sin one cannot be alive unto God through Christ.

Peter makes the unmistakably clear statement that, "*There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 3:20-21).*" To the follower of Christ Peter says that baptism is no more a mere symbol of salvation than the ark would have been a mere symbol to Noah and his family. God chose the ark (in its detail, construction,

loading, etc.) as the means by which Noah was to express his faith (Heb. 11:7), without which he and his family would have been destroyed with the remainder of the world. Clearly then, baptism, immersion in water unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 8:36; Mk. 16:16), is of no less importance to the one who would please God today as was the ark for Noah, and without which the disobedient will be lost with the rest of the world.

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