

It Is Written

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On the Seriousness of Turning from God

by Doy Moyer

We are aware (or ought to be) of the passages teaching that those who were enlightened and then turn away from the Lord are worse off than before. For example, see Luke 14:25-33 and 2 Peter 2:20-22. Or think about what the writer of Hebrews had to say in Hebrews 6:4-6: "For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt."

Many passages warn against the dangers of turning back once we have started down the path of serving the Lord. But I want to think briefly about another angle.

When we become Christians, we are committing ourselves to the Lord. This is a lifetime commitment, not a "let's see how it goes and then we'll decide later" type of commitment. Our commitment to the Lord is likened to marriage (cf. Eph 5:22-33). We serve the Lord, knowing full well that our yes means yes (Matt 5:37; Jas 5:12). When we decide to serve God, we enter into a covenant; we have made a vow, a commitment, and we have given our word, knowing we are to pay what we vow. The Preacher wrote this in Ecclesiastes 5:4-6:

"When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?"

Do you think of your commitment to the Lord as a vow? Did you commit yourself to serve Him through life? Has that commitment changed? Are you as committed to this relationship now as you were when you first submitted to the Lord? Has it grown stronger?

We cannot downplay turning from the Lord to make it sound innocent. This is not merely a lifestyle change. When we who have made such a commitment turn away from the Lord, then we lose our integrity with it. We are no longer people of our word. Our "yes" is no longer a "yes." We have essentially lied to the Lord, and if we will go back on the most significant commitment we ever make, then what keeps us true to other commitments? What else might we be willing to downplay as important? What other vows and commitments are we willing to break?

Does that sound a little harsh? Perhaps so, but I want us to get the truth of this set firmly in our minds. Turning away from God after having become a Christian means that the most serious of all vows and commitments has been cast aside. How else can we see it? We have renounced sainthood for becoming unbelievers who can only expect judgment. Recall the Israelites who perished in the wilderness: "And to who did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief" (Heb 3:18-19). Recall, also, that we are trampling underfoot the Son of God, profaning the blood of the covenant by which we were sanctified, and insulting the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:28). We should thus understand, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (v. 31).

I'm not talking about sinning while still striving to be true to God, as per 1 John 1:7-9 and 2:1-2. I'm talking about throwing it all away and casting aside our confidence (Heb 10:35). The inspired writers do not whitewash this matter at all. Peter said it was like a dog returning to its own vomit (2 Pet 2:22). This is not something we can afford to think is harmless.

When we are tempted to give up completely, think about this. If we take covenant seriously; if we mean what we say; if our vows are worth anything ... then we need to return once again to our Lord and seek His face. If we are people of our word, we will not quit. We may stumble, crawl, scratch, and claw through difficulties, but by the help and grace of God, we will not quit! Ever.

“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.... But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul” (Heb 10:36, 39).

SELF-CONTROL

by Bill Hall

What is the value of self-control? Self-control is that which enables us to hold our tongues when we are tempted to viciously put someone in his place once and for all; or when we know a juicy bit of gossip that would be entertaining to the group and would turn us into the "life of the party"; or when an occasion almost demands that we betray a confidence that must not be betrayed under any circumstances.

Self-control is that which enables us to control our passions when another is provoking us to anger; that keeps the clinched fists in the pockets when the agitator is only half our size; that keeps the lips sealed when another is railing and swearing at us. Self-control is that which enables us to be like our Lord "who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Self-control is that which enables us to maintain purity of heart and to thrust out evil thoughts before they can take root; that enables us to place the best possible construction on another person's actions when unproven rumors could easily destroy our confidence in him; that helps us to maintain a cheerful disposition when everything around us has turned sour. Self-control is that which enables us to love the unlovable and to hate that which the world loves.

Self-control is that which enables us to rule our appetites; to say, "no" when our lusts would lead us to sin or when that which is harmful to our health is placed before us. Self-control is that which enables the smoker to put down his cigarettes and the alcoholic to put down his drink and never return to it. Self-control is that which enables us to rule rather than to be enslaved.

The Bible does not glorify the indifferent and impassive. It is not our goal to be uncaring. To be like Paul, we must be able to have our spirit stirred within us when we are surrounded by evil (Acts 17:16). To be like our Lord, we must sometimes feel anger when surrounded by hypocritical self-righteousness (Mark 3:5); we must even react with occasional outbursts of goodness on occasions, as when the Lord cleansed the temple (John 2:13-17). But, all such outbursts must be tempered with self-control, that in our anger we "do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26).

God does not view our uncontrolled actions with amusement. Our temper tantrums and harsh, unbridled words are soul threatening, a potential bar to the abundant entrance into the Lord's everlasting kingdom (2 Peter 1:5-11). We must not minimize the danger. We must not surrender to this evil.

What is the value of self-control? It is one of the qualities that enable us to go to heaven. The possessor of it is rich indeed.