

It Is Written

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On Drifting Away from the Faith

By Terry Wane Benton

If we surveyed churches who declined in attendance because of COVID, we may find an alarming number of brethren who fell or are in process of drifting further away. I remember thinking a long time ago that should persecution arise in our country, and it was viewed as a crime to be a Christian and assemble with Christians, that this would test us to the core of our faith, and many would not look for a way to assemble but would find their excuse not to assemble.

Two kinds of brethren would emerge in such a picture:

- Those with faith to find a way because the Lord and the brethren come first (Matthew 6:33; Hebrews 10:24-25), and
- Those who would let fear rule over their faith (II Tim. 1:7; I John 4:18).

Persecution was not the only test that could do this. It turned out that fear of a virus could do the same thing. Fear ruled over faith and love in many cases and showed us what we really were deep down. The love of many waxed cold. Some could go to every public event, restaurant, ballgame, and grocery store but not to the church. They could find a way for every event but the church assemblies. Fear can justify very unreasonable decisions and becomes very inconsistent. It tested our faith and fear won in many cases. The church is more dangerous than other places? Other places are worth the risks? Did fear isolate us from our own families? Or just our spiritual family? Did we cut off family members who did not share our fear or just spiritual family members who did not seem willing to comply with the rules of our fear?

We need to evaluate how the test of fear either exposed a weakness of faith and love in us or provided the opportunity to prove how genuine our faith and love are. If we did not do too well in this test, how would we do under persecution? Fear comes in various forms and tests us. How well we do in smaller tests may very well expose a lack of faith for bigger tests of faith to come. The trying of our faith exposes "genuineness" (I Peter 1:6-7) or exposes the lack of it. Did the test prove your faith genuine, making it shine brighter? Or did the light of Christ in you grow dimmer? Did you get stronger, or did you start drifting away from the faith in Jesus?

What would you have done if it was a crime to be a Christian? Would there be enough evidence to convict you? Let us each "examine yourselves whether you be in the faith" (II Corinthians 13:5) or whether we let fear rule and cause us to drift away!

A Common Problem

By Steve Klein

Do you tend to have problems that no one else has? If so, this article is for you. And it might surprise you to learn that I know what your problem is. Your problem is that you think your problems are unique, and your perspective is preventing you from getting the help you need to solve your problems. After all, if no one else has ever had your problems, then no one else could possibly help you solve them. Right? In fact, if no one has your problems, then no one can really even understand your problems. In which case, you would be perfectly justified to continue to tell yourself that "no one

understands me" or "no one else knows what I'm going through" or "I can't beat this" or "there's no way out." That would all be correct IF no one else has your problems. But they do.

This realization contains tremendous problem-solving power. If others have been through what you are going through, then a number of things are true.

First, you are not alone.

Second, someone can sympathize with you (maybe many someones).

Third, your problem can be solved, overcome or dealt with - others have done it, why not you?

Fourth, help is available.

The world's chief problem causer is Satan. And while he certainly delights in trying to make your life miserable, he has other fish to fry as well. Surely we can understand that the devil is working just as hard on everyone else as he is on you and me. The apostle Peter counsels us to "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world" (I Peter 5:8-9).

In helping Christians deal with their troubles, Paul repeatedly reminds them that what they were experiencing was not unique. He tells the suffering Philippians that they were going through "the same conflict" which they had seen in him (Philippians 1:29-30). He tells the Thessalonians that they had "suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans" (I Thessalonians 2:14). He tells the Corinthians that they were "enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer" (II Corinthians 1:6).

If others have experienced your trials and temptations and made it through, so can you. This is the point in I Corinthians 10:13 where Paul writes, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." One modern speech translation of the first part of 1 Corinthians 10:13 reads "You are tempted in the same way that everyone else is tempted . . ." (CEV).

The most important step in overcoming a problem is recognizing it. But the second most important step is realizing that there are those who can help. This is true whether the problem is alcoholism, a rocky marriage, financial woes, or just plain sin. And for Christians, it is especially important to realize that there is One who can help, no matter what the problem is. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16).

God Comes First

By Frank Himmel

Loving Him with our whole heart is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-37). We say it and sing it, but do we practice it? What do our calendars say? What about those Sundays when the kids have a ball game or when we are on vacation - does He come first those Sundays? What do our checkbooks say? Does He come first in finances or is He somewhere down the list, perhaps even beneath what we spend on recreation? What do our closets say? Do our wardrobes reflect godliness or worldliness? In the Apostle's words, "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18).