

How to Keep Saved

by Charles Ewing Brown

The sermon emphasizes the importance of discipline, spiritual growth, and fellowship in achieving a successful Christian life.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:24, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 10:24, 2 Peter 1:5, 1 John 4:19

Topics: "Christian Discipline", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Charles Ewing Brown preaches about the importance of discipline, awakening love, fellowship with other believers, the beginning of the Christian life, and the poise of power in the Christian journey. He emphasizes the necessity of discipline in developing one's faith, the awakening of love towards God through prayer and communion, the significance of fellowship with other believers, the understanding that Christian disciplines are the beginning and not the end of the Christian life, and the balance needed to avoid fanaticism and extreme measures in serving God.

Transcript

A famous professor at Harvard University used to begin his lectures with a suggestion that each student look around him and take note that before the course was finished the man on his right and the man on his left would both be "flunked" out of the course, meaning by this that two-thirds of the students would be eliminated and only one-third allowed to pass. The intention of the professor was to put his students sharply on their guard that each of them might do his utmost to be counted in the successful one-third who maintained a creditable standing in the class. The fact that the standards of the school were so high that only one-third could pass the test was supposed to reflect great credit upon the school. Is it not strange that people take the same line of reasoning to set up a standard of condemnation and reproach of the gospel of Christ? It is a standing accusation against Christianity that there are so many hypocrites and backsliders. People pretend to think there is not much to it because so few "hold out," as they say, and so many fall away. Knowing the weakness and frailty of human nature, we praise a great university because it rejects the many and graduates the few, but we condemn Christianity because there are few that be saved. The reason that only a comparative few pass the standards of Harvard University is because its standards are high; and the reason only a few, comparatively, are saved and even a lesser few hold out to the end is because "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way ... and few there be that find it." Or to quote another text: "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

William James once said something to the effect that it is better that people, even for once in their lives, have a great vision of the possibilities of grace and high noble living though they fall away from that standard, than never to have sensed such possibilities at all. Nevertheless, we are sure that those who have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, and have felt the delicious thrill of the grace of God, must hold a keen and anxious desire to maintain their standing in that amazing grace and must cherish a desire to make progress therein.

THE BURDEN OF DISCIPLINE

Once I knew a boy as lively as a squirrel whose mother nearly broke his heart by compelling him to come in from the ball game and the enthusiastic play with the boys and sit in the prison-like enclosure of the room, pounding the keys of a piano until he was sick with disgust at the very word music. But the mother was wiser than the boy thought, for the years swiftly passed and this young man became one of the most versatile and talented musicians I have ever seen. He could play almost any instrument and he reveled in music as a bird revels in the glorious sunlight of a summer day. The mother knew that resolution, a strong will, and good intentions would not make her son a musician. Discipline was required. In the same way we must remind all young Christians that they may not save themselves by strength of will, by iron resolution, by strong decision. A certain amount of discipline is necessary in order to develop music, scholarship, or any other worth-while calling to the point where it is a habitual joy; but through a misunderstanding of science and a lack of religious training many young Christians have fallen into the slipshod idea that all that is necessary for the maintenance of the Christian life is simply the conduct described by conventional morality. Spiritual religion is more than mere conventional morality. It is friendship with God, and while no ceremony can bring one into friendship with God, it is true that certain practices of spiritual devotion will deepen and increase the friendship and fellowship with God which is initiated by regeneration.

THE AWAKENING OF LOVE

Into our home five children were born. One died at the age of four. There is no sweeter memory than the experience of waking one of these babies when it became necessary to do so. As I bent over the sweet little innocent face I knew that there was nothing but love for me in that heart, but it was latent, or sleeping, love. Then I would awaken the child and she would open her little eyes, look up into my face, see who it was, smile, and then put her arms around my neck and hug me tightly. The love which had been sleeping in her heart had wakened and had become active, and through that activity it grew with the passing years and became stronger. If I had been forced to go away while that little child was asleep and had not returned for fifteen or twenty years, when I came back I would have found that that love had slept so long it had died away entirely. And to me this is a parable of prayer. Our heavenly Father bends over us, as it were, each morning, and as we awaken we look into his face and gaze into his eyes; our love awakens and manifests itself in prayer, communion, and praising the beauty of holiness and exalting the love that redeemed us.

'Tis blest to rise, O Lord, and join

With nature's minstrelsy.

To hymn Thy praise at early morn,

And offer thanks to Thee.

Touched by Thy hand of love, we wake,
And rise from sweet repose;
Thy praise shall first the silence break,
Thy peace within us flows.

The love is always in our hearts but it grows stronger as it awakens from time to time and expresses itself in fruitful, refreshing, and passionate communion with God. I believe that nearly all backsliders begin to fail first at this point: they cannot find time to pray. Many of them are frightened off by the idea that a Christian must pray three or four hours at a time in order really to make a successful prayer; whereas the length of the prayer is not so important as the habit of praying repeatedly and at certain set intervals and giving oneself enough time to pray from the heart in communion with God. Books on prayer and devotional works will encourage and promote the life of prayer. They are certainly as important in the life of a Christian as scientific books are to a student of science.

Perhaps we all need to be reminded that the greatest of all devotional books is the Bible. Some people are afraid to try to read the Bible; they think it will involve such a vast labor of scholarly study that they cannot afford to pick up the habit. After spending a long time in the study of the Bible in the original languages and with all scholarly helps available in this age, I would like to disabuse the minds of young Christians of the feeling that the Bible is too deep and too hard for a common person to get anything from it. I would advise young converts, regardless of the extent of their education, to begin reading the Bible. First of all, I should say begin reading with the New Testament -- simply read it as you would read any other book, and that means not merely a few verses at a time... Read whole books of the Bible consecutively, and when possible read a whole book through at one time. Most of the books of the New Testament can be read through in less time than one gives to the daily newspaper; and the whole New Testament is not larger than the average city Sunday newspaper. After a person has read the New Testament for some time it is likely that he will wish to study it more systematically, but we have not space to discuss that here. I would suggest that you get a copy of Introduction to the New Testament, by Dr. Adam W. Miller, and read it along with the New Testament.

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SAINTS

It is surprising what mechanical ideas some people have about church, fellowship, and worship. They think of the church as a massive institution taking much and giving little, requiring its people to deliver to it a maximum of money and of time. How foolish and vain such ideas are to spiritually-minded Christians! Take your own home as an illustration. Is that home an institution which holds you with iron bands? By no means. Every home in America is as frail as a bird's nest, so far as its power to hold its members by compulsion is concerned. Our homes are as strong as granite castles because they serve us. We find there the things which we need and for which we long with passionate devotion. A man loves his home; he loves its peace, its fellowship, and the sense of affection which crowns it with grace and blessing. He loves it so well that he is willing to work every working day of his life in order to maintain it, and when tragedies of life separate him from that home his heart turns back toward it with a pain that constitutes almost the greatest suffering of mortal life. These reflections should teach us the meaning of the church, of fellowship, and of the blessedness of corporate acts of worship. We do not go to church because the church demands something of us. We go because it gives us something. We do not give our money to the church because the church charges us so much; we give our money because the ministry which the church

maintains brings us rich benefits that are sweeter than life itself.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord," said David, and this is certainly the ideal of all vigorous, healthy, normal religious life. But if we have sunk to the point where prayer, reading the Bible, and church fellowship are a burden to us, it is already time to arouse ourselves and begin to open our hearts to the spiritual influence which will make the Christian life a joy and a blessing. One of these days we doubtless shall be carried dead into the house of worship. What a pity it will be if those who file past our open coffin shall not know whose face they see except as it is announced by the pastor!

THE BEGINNING OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

No doubt one of the greatest hindrances of Christian discipline of prayer, Bible reading, and public worship is that so many people regard these as the whole end and object of the Christian life; and looking at it in that light, they casually suppose that the game is not worth the candle. They regard all this discipline as an unnecessary yoke around the neck. It is a great pity that with all our preaching we ministers have not sufficiently indoctrinated the people that all this is not the end but the beginning of the Christian life. These are not the things for which people live. They do these things to strengthen themselves and to learn really how to live the Christian life in the fullest sense of the word. The Christian life is realized in a fellowship with God flowing like rivers in the desert through a man's heart every day, but these fruitful streams will dry up if they help the individual alone. In order to keep the channels open they must flow out of his life into the lives of others. The real work of the Christian life is a witness for Christ on the part of the believer wherever he lives and works and goes. Young men in school are taught to be doctors, but all of that would be in vain if, when they graduated, they did not practice medicine. The discipline of the Christian life is simply the preparation to practice Christianity in the office, the home, the shop, and in private and public life, in every place where a brave and true witness to the truth will serve to heal the hurt of humanity and make the world a better place in which to live.

THE POISE OF POWER

All genuinely earnest and spiritual Christians have at some time strong temptation to go into the extremes of fanaticism. They follow the theory of the man who, when given a bottle of medicine by his physician and told to take one teaspoonful three times a day reasoned that if a little was good, more would be better and so took the whole bottle at one dose and nearly killed himself. Certainly, no one can ever do too much for his Lord, but experienced Christians have found that success in the Christian life is not won by violent extremes. One might reason that if it is good to read the Bible, why not read it all day? and is it not more important to read the Bible all day than to go to work? But if one should read the Bible all day, would it not be better to pray all day, and so on? If we pray all day we shall have to give up reading the Bible. If we read the Bible all day we shall miss visiting the sick. If we visit the sick all day we shall miss earning a living for our family.

Regarding giving, some people say that if it is good to give a tenth, why not give 50 per cent or 75 per cent, possibly 90 per cent. I would not be foolish or wicked enough to say that nobody ought ever to give 90 per cent of his income to the Lord, but I have about reached the conclusion that if we can bring Christians up to give 10 per cent we shall be doing enough for this generation. Moreover, if a Christian is a steward he has some responsibility regarding the capital which he is supposed to invest and develop.

All of us have seen the harm which comes from fanatical extremes. People who start out to force themselves by will power to pray three hours a day or to practice other extreme forms of discipline nearly always wind up by making a failure; consequently, they become embittered and accuse others of being as big failures as they are themselves. The Christian life is the life of loving fellowship with God. Such a life is made easy because streams of power pour into the heart of the believer from those fountains which lie in the heart of God. God is not served by resolute will-worship, but by loving devotion. If one will only stop to observe a great engine of perhaps a hundred thousand horsepower he will note the smoothness and noiselessness with which that engine runs. That is a symbol of the poise and balance of a victorious Christian life.

There is simply no way whereby we can do more for the Lord, and give more to the Lord, than by living in such close fellowship with him that we will grow in grace and so increase our capacity for service.

We think of the painters of the great churches in the Middle Ages. One painter is so eager to do more that he works sixteen hours a day, but he also becomes weary physically and his work is not of the best. Another man is as eager as the first to do his best and to give the most possible, but he eats wisely, sleeps enough, and rests. Observing these laws of health, he can work only five or six hours a day, but his work is so fine that it has much greater value than that of the other artist and will have the admiration of men for a thousand years to come. That man did more because he worked wisely and tempered his passion with patience. The world of our time needs skillful, faithful, and devoted workers in order to promote the interest of the kingdom of God, but such people must be sold out to God and must realize that they are going to spend every day of their lives growing in the knowledge of the truth and laboring fervently for Christ. But what is the goal of human life? It has been variously described throughout all time. Some have said that it is to know the good; for, they said, if anyone knows the good he will do it and failure to do the good is due to lack of knowledge. Of course, there is a grain of truth in this theory and yet all our experience has shown us that men will sin against the brightest light; they will rebel in the full knowledge of what they are doing, as in the case of Judas Iscariot, for example. Others have said that the attainment of power is the object of life. That object has been described as the good of society, the happiness of all men. Others have affirmed that obedience to law is the aim of life.

There is an eternal right, they say, and it is man's duty to pursue it. Happiness, some contend, is the goal of life; for others, it is the vision of God; for still others, it is the development of all one's powers.

When we put all these standards of life to the test we find that they are all good as far as they go, but they do not touch the very central point. The supreme end and object of life is to love God perfectly and to love humanity as ourselves. So the goal is not happiness, although this is the only way to be happy. It is not primarily the keeping of a set of laws, although the man who attains this goal will keep all laws. It is love -- love to God and love to our fellow man.

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