

Consistency

by J.B. Stoney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being true to our high position in Christ Jesus, and not lowering our standing to conform to the world's standards.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:14, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:22, Philippians 3:20, Colossians 3:1

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

J.B. Stoney delves into the concept of consistency, contrasting the standards of living by the law versus living by Christ. He emphasizes that those who strive to live by Christ's standard, though appearing inconsistent to the world, are called to a higher spiritual life that transcends mere moral perfection. Stoney highlights the importance of maintaining faith in the power of Christ to truly live a consistent Christian life, even when faced with challenges and temptations to conform to worldly standards.

Transcript

CONSISTENCY is being true to a given standard. Now the constant taunt is that there is more consistency when a lower position is assumed than when a higher one is insisted on. The pretensions are of course in keeping with the position. It is said, for instance, and with some show of justice, that they who make the law the rule of life are more consistent than they who believe and assume that Christ is their life and model in everything. Consistent to what? is the question. To the law or to Christ? But that is not the comparison intended. The force of the reproach is this, that they who do not profess such high ground are on the whole better men, and less erratic, than they who do. Now we shall clear the ground immensely if we consider the position of each with regard to the standard by which his consistency can be judged. The law addresses a man in the flesh; Christ is only known and maintained by His own Spirit. I do not disown and ignore man by the law; I cultivate and restrain him, and according as this is successful, I add to man's self-respect and self-distinction. On the contrary, as Christ is received and followed, man as he is in the flesh, is ignored; and the Spirit, which controls and uses his body and mind as belonging to Christ, is alone acknowledged.

Now there is a great difference between these two standards; and not only so, but the effect or demand which each has on me is vastly different. In the one case I am required to exalt men to the only true, proper, and divine elevation for a man; in the other I am required to be a dead man and accept another and a higher life, and, in the power of it, to impersonate Him who is the fountain and source of it to me. Surely the difference is immeasurable. And hence, if I analyze the history of a disciple of each of these

standards, I cannot fail to see that the one who is required to exalt himself to his highest moral point makes a much better appearance, and walks apparently with more consistency than the one who is called to set aside self at every point - which is the ground he has professed to take - and to walk outside that which is of the flesh, in the spirit of Christ, as a heavenly man. No doubt the latter vastly surpasses the former when he is consistent with his standard, but this can only be in proportion as he is held by the power which transfers him from his own self into Christ.

If his hold on, or faith in, that power relaxes, he is worse off than one who only seeks to conform himself to the moral perfection of the law, because he has nothing to fall back upon, or to act on as to himself, his calling being to love outside himself in Christ; whereas the other is called to live properly in himself. It is plain that if I make myself my study with any true purpose, I cultivate myself to exhibit a certain commendable appearance. The law was to set up the first Adam in its best estate. But if through grace I seek to live outside the first Adam, and to live Christ, I am infinitely worse off in appearance, when I fall back to myself, than one who had never abandoned the old man at all. I am practically the sow that was washed, wallowing in the mire. I am like one reduced to a level where every one is better off and more skilled than he is.

In short, the one tries to excel in walking; the other knows that he is required to fly, and studies flying only. Hence, if he falls, he must appear more powerless than the one who walks, and whose skill in walking is commendable. No one can be so helpless or pitiable as one who is destined to fly when he forfeits his power of doing so. Surly such a one must appear among walkers more incompetent and inconsistent than the feeblest walker.

Another thing has to be taken into account. The man who cultivates himself obtains commendation from men in a measure that the one who cultivates Christ will never receive or elicit. The one cultivates what exalts man, and therefore what suits man; the other, that which ignores man and which rises above him. Hence we need to be careful lest the good in man which we sometimes commend be really of Christ or not. We must not forget that that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God; and doubtless many a one, falling, or failing to fly, but still accepting no lower position, is more acceptable in the eye of God than one very fair in his conduct and walk among men, who seeks only to raise himself to the standard of the law, which is the first Adam's highest elevation. The inconsistency complained of arises in fact not from the high position to which we are called, but from our not walking according to it. There is no fault in the high position, but it is easier to nature to walk in the lower position. But then this lower position, however commended by man, loses all its value before God when I find He has called me to the higher one, and not to the lower at all. If this be admitted, the comparison cannot be maintained. I may censure a saint for not walking up to his high position, but I cannot commend one who excuses himself for taking a position to which God has not called him, because he can walk among men more evenly therein than in that to which God has called him. In fine, such an argument amounts to this - that it is better for those who are called to fly not to attempt it, but to walk, because if they attempt to fulfill their calling they might fall; so that it is better in the apprehension of such reasoners to ignore and deny our calling.

The above thoughts have been suggested by a communication from a correspondent on "high profession with low walk", concluding with the following remarks; "Doubtless it is most displeasing to God to see a high profession with a low walk"; But we must remember that God has laid down our true position, and, in reality, we cannot alter it. Every Christian is really in the high position, whether he owns it or not. It is a vain for any to say, "Oh, I fear I cannot maintain a corresponding walk, and therefore I will take a lower

position". The Word is plain and positive: "God... hath quickened us" young or old, instructed or ignorant, "together with Christ, and hath... made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:4-6). This is our true position, and surely no one can think of taking a lower position, without doing despite to the Spirit of grace, in order that his walk may be more consistent. If really a Christian, his position must remain the same. Just as an adopted son to whom, by unalterable bonds, I make over an estate, may refuse to consider himself a son, and may associate with the bond-servants, or even run again into distance and exile; still he is my son, and the estate is his. The more shame on him if he does not appreciate it.

Such is grace, the boundless grace of our God! and we cannot have any lower standing. Young Christian, older pilgrim! we are all in that high and holy place in Christ Jesus. Shall it be said of us who accredit this truth, that our walk is less steady than the walk of any who do not accredit or appreciate it? Surely not. We cannot lower our standing if we would; nor would we if we could. We cannot preach a lower gospel. Let us then, one and all, seek to walk more and more in the power of the Holy Spirit, and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. Amen.

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