

# A Call to Balance!

by R. Stanley

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*R. Stanley's sermon emphasizes the necessity of balance in various aspects of Christian faith and practice to avoid extremism and promote healthy ministry.*

**Topics:** "Christian Living", "Spiritual Balance"

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## Description

R. Stanley emphasizes the importance of balance in Christian life and ministry, drawing from A. W. Tozer's analogy of truth needing two wings to fly. He highlights the need to balance various aspects such as love of God and wrath of God, Old Testament and New Testament, life and ministry, fruit and gifts, Bible meditation and prayer, prosperity and adversity, discipline and liberty, local church and frontier missions, evangelism and social concern, and present and future fulfillment of promises.

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## Transcript

One of the greatest needs in Christian life and ministry is BALANCE. A. W. Tozer said, "Truth is like a bird: it cannot fly on one wing!" I had a problem in my left ear and the doctors called it Menier's disease. That at times caused imbalance and it was terrible. Truth is parallel. Dr. Campbell Morgan observed, "The whole truth does not lie in It-is-written, but in It-is-written and It-is-written-again" (See Mt 4:6,7). The second text must be placed over against the first to balance it and give it symmetry. Error need not be untruth. Many times it is partial truth or one aspect of the truth. Ministries can have various emphases, but any emphasis should not lead to eccentricity. We should not emphasize one truth at the cost of the other. Eccentricity has been the root cause for many cults. Eccentricity or extremism leads to seclusion and superiority complex. The victim begins to think that he or his group has a revelation of a particular truth which no one else has.

Jesus was the most balanced person as we meet Him in the Gospels. For example, look at His growth in Luke 2:52. He grew physically -- "in stature" -- as well as intellectually-- "in wisdom;" and spiritually -- "in favour with God" -- as well as socially -- "in favour with men." He is the Son of God as well as the Son of Man.

Here are ten vital areas where we need balance.

1. Love of God and Wrath of God

Someone commented, "God is too loving to send anyone to eternal hell." The other person answered, "At the same time God is too holy to allow a sinner into Heaven!" For a broken and repentant sinner the love of God must be presented. For a stiff-necked person the wrath of God must be stressed. Apostle Paul balances this twin characters of God beautifully in Romans 11:22, "Consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you goodness, if you continue in His goodness." Jesus spoke about the love of God in John 3:16 but about condemnation in verse 18. He preached both about Heaven and Hell. Even in His Great Commission Jesus included both: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16). There are simply too many pictures portraying Christ as the gentle Shepherd with a rod of comfort. But the picture of Christ driving out businessmen from the temple with a whip is uncommon. When the wrath and holiness of God are not sufficiently stressed, there will be no fear of God. This explains why there are all kinds of atrocities in churches and ministries. The love of God and the wrath of God are inseparable on the Cross. There God manifested His maximum love and maximum wrath. A minister who speaks only about the love of God will produce spurious converts, and the one who speaks only about the wrath of God sad Christians.

## 2. Old Testament and New Testament

Both the Testaments together make the Word of God. The two Testaments are the two lips of God. The New Testament is concealed in the Old. The Old is revealed in the New. Jesus said, "Every religious teacher instructed concerning the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Mt 13:52). All the doctrines in the Bible have their origin in the Old Testament, but they are fully developed in the New. That's why Paul wrote to Timothy, "All Scripture is profitable" (2 Tim 3:16). It is true that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament are no more binding on us, but we have rich lessons from the OT examples. Referring to this Paul wrote, "Now all these things happened to them (Israelites) as examples, and they are written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor 10:11). At the same time we should understand the extent of application of any OT passage. Otherwise legalism will set in. We must "rightly divide the Word of truth" (2 Tim 2: 15). Reading through both the Testaments once a year or once in two years is a healthy practice. A basic study of Dispensations is a must, but we should also avoid extreme dispensationalism.

## 3. Life and Ministry

Life first, ministry next -- is a good slogan. But both are equally important. John the Baptist was a "burning and shining" lamp (Jn 5:35). "Burning" is what happens in a person. "Shining" is what goes to others from a person. One is life and the other is ministry. We should both live the Gospel and proclaim it. Being a witness means both being and speaking, life and lip. One is not complete without the other. Sanctification that does not lead to service has missed the whole purpose. "Sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim 2:21). The disciples were not perfected when Jesus commissioned them to go. They had unbelief, disunity, inquisitiveness into other people's matters and all that kind. They had to wait only for anointing and not for perfecting. This does not mean we should overlook sin in the ministry. No, but we should not hesitate to minister for the Lord saying we are weak and imperfect. Go through the Bible to find one perfect minister. God is our Potter and we are just clay. We are still in the making, until Christ comes. If we miss this truth we will go about wearing the perfectionist glasses, and every active minister of the Gospel will look like an awful sinner to us! At the same time, neglecting one's life and running about with ministry will have disastrous results. Both ourselves and the Kingdom of God will suffer heavy loss. Paul rightly said, "I discipline my body and bring it to subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor 9:27).

#### 4. Fruit and Gifts

Christians can be broadly classified as charismatics and non-charismatics. One group emphasizes the gifts of the Spirit and the other the fruit of the Spirit. But both are important and necessary. There was immorality and carnality in the Corinthian Church, but they lacked no gift (1 Cor 1:7; 3:3; 5:1). Paul did not immediately decry their gifts. On the other hand he said, "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts" (1 Cor 14:1). When Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, He did both deeds of love and acts of power (Acts 10:38). Spiritual gifts are not a barometer of one's spirituality. It is possible to speak in tongues or prophesy or perform miracles without love (1 Cor 13:1-3). Therefore those through whom God manifests His gifts spectacularly must search their lives diligently and walk in all godliness. Otherwise the Name of the Lord will be blasphemed. God does not quickly withdraw His gifts when we go astray. But this should not be mistaken as God's tolerance or overlooking of sin in our life. He is patient. "Do you despise the riches of His longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance?" (Rom 2:4). Again, the observation of misuse of gifts has driven many to turn totally against gifts. But the remedy for misuse is not non-use but proper use. "Let all things be done --decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40). Galatians 5:22,23 speak of the virtues of the Spirit-filled life, and 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 of the gifts of the Spirit. Jesus said every tree shall be known by its "fruit." Here the word "fruit" means outcome or benefit, which includes both the virtues and the gifts.

#### 5. Bible Meditation and Prayer

We speak to God in prayer. He speaks to us through His Word. A balanced devotional life must thus be a conversational relationship with God. In the warfare passage in Ephesians, the Word of God is presented as the Sword of the Spirit and prayer as the sharpener of all the weapons (Eph 6:13-20). Both are equally important. People who spend a lot of time in prayer but neglect Bible meditation are prone to deception. Several false and funny doctrines have followed forty days of fasting by many a leader or preacher. What was wrong? While fasting the man didn't spend sufficient time with the Word and so he was caught up in some deception in the spirit world. When the devil suggested to Jesus to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger, Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God!" (Mt 4:4). In other words, "During My days of fasting I was actually feasting on the Word of God!" At the same time anyone who neglects prayer but spends all his time in mere Bible study will be puffed up and ending in spiritual dryness. "Knowledge puffs up" (1 Cor 8:1). The purpose of Bible study is to know God and worship Him duly (Psa 138:2). The meditation of the Word enhances our prayer and worship and vice versa. Extra-Biblical revelations are dangerous and so kneeling before God in prayer and worship with our Bibles open is the safest devotional pattern.

#### 6. Prosperity and Adversity

Sometime ago it was thought the deeper the poverty the greater the spirituality. Now the pendulum has swung to the other side! Radio, television, magazines and pulpits are filled with the prosperity message. Some prosperity preachers have gone to the extent to say, "If you are saved you must be healed and prosperous!" Well, both the extremes are wrong. God balances the life of His children with times of prosperity as well as adversity. No man of God in the Scripture was otherwise. But in all situations they learnt to be content and praising the Almighty. Paul said, "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!" (Phil 4:12,13). Faith is not to be thought as a magic power to get whatever we need, or living in want and suffering an indication of poor

faith. Hebrews Chapter 11 strikes a healthy balance. By faith they "received" as well as "offered." By faith they "prospered" as well as "suffered." Read the entire chapter. "Night and day" continue to be God's original plan (Gen 1:5). Job had a balanced theology: "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity? In all this Job did not sin with his lips" (Job 2:10). Hear what Solomon the wise said: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other!" (Eccl 7:14)

## 7. Discipline and Liberty

During a particular period in Israel's history, "there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 17:6). God has placed leaders in the New Testament Church for the growth and wellbeing of the saints. "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls" (Heb 13:17). At the same time leadership should not become dictatorship. Paul was right when he wrote, "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand" (2 Cor 1:24). The New Testament Church is neither a democracy nor dictatorship. It is a joyful blend of accountability and personal freedom. People don't grow or blossom when there is no freedom. Some Christians are afraid to do anything without the permission of their pastor or leader. The New Testament does not teach this kind of leadership. Children will grow wholesome only when there is both discipline and freedom at home. The Boy Jesus was submissive to His parents, and at the same time free to be about His Father's business (Lk 2:49-52). The spiritual life of many believers is stunted and they suffocate because of their popish leaders. "Stand firm in the liberty by which Christ has made us free... For you, brothers, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal 5:1,13).

## 8. Local Church and Frontier Missions

God has placed Evangelists and Pastors side by side in the ministers' list of Ephesians 4:11. But there is always a tension and friction between these two ministers. The Evangelist's slogan is "Go!" and that of the Pastor is "Come!" One is a tensile force and the other compressive. Both must work in cooperation for smooth functioning. When we fold our hand our biceps contracts and the triceps stretches. When we stretch our hand it is vice versa. What a beautiful picture of operation in cooperation! This is how the members in the Body of Christ must function. The mission of the church is missions; the mission of the missions is church planting. One exists for the other. They are not competitive but complementary. The mobile ministers, namely Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists are mentioned first and then follow the residential ministers, Pastors and Teachers. What does this mean? The evangelist is a quarryman and unless he blasts the rocks and brings in the boulders the pastor will not have raw material to work with for his fine chisel work! Paul was a frontier missionary and his team was a missionary organisation. They were supported by local churches (Phil 4:15,16). Pastors should not be afraid that their funds will decrease if people are exposed to missions. This is simply an unfounded fear. God loves and blesses the missionary-minded churches. Also missions should not think of themselves as independent bodies but an extension of the local churches. Jesus predicted two things: "I will build My Church" and "The Gospel shall be preached to all Nations!"

## 9. Evangelism and Social Concern

Jesus fed the people both spiritually and physically. He forgave their sins and healed their diseases. But the order is important. First, preach the Gospel, and then, heal the sick (Mt 10:7,8). The Gospel is both

spiritual and social. It is "glory to God" and "good will toward men" (Lk 2:14). The Cross means reconciliation with God and with man. Reconciliation includes love, concern and care. Apostle James said, "Faith without works is dead" (Js 2:17). By works he meant acts of charity. "If a brother or sister is naked and without daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace (evangelistic greeting!), be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?" (Js 2:15,16) While the Apostles in Jerusalem sent forth Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to the non-Jews, they told them to "remember the poor" (Gal 2:9,10). We will be judged not only for the sins of commission but also sins of omission. The sin of omission is generally what we fail to do to the needy and suffering (Mt 25:41-46). A leper can go to heaven but not a sinner. Therefore the priority is always preaching the gospel. But the other should not be neglected. In the words of Jesus, "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Mt 23:23). Medical evangelism and literacy evangelism should not be decried by direct or pulpit evangelism. All should function in harmony with mutual recognition and appreciation.

## 10. Present and Future

There are some who insist on the fulfilment of several eschatological promises right today. Others are content to be hoping of a glorious future at the Second Coming of Christ. The first group calls the second as futurists. I believe most of the New Testament promises have both a present and a future fulfilment. For example, take the subject of holiness. We can be "purified" today but will be "perfected" only at the coming of the Lord (1 Jn 3:2,3; 1 Thess 5:23). Similarly the question of healing. We can enjoy the benefits of Calvary only to a certain extent in our bodies today. But the full benefit will be enjoyed at the redemption of our body which we await (Rom 8:23). Disease or death is not totally eradicated today. The "last" enemy that will be destroyed is death (1 Cor 15:26). Then the day will dawn when there will be "no more death, or sorrow, or crying" (Rev 21:4). Another subject of interest is the Kingdom of God. The spiritual Kingdom is already "within us," but the literal one is still in the future (Lk 17:21; Rom 14:17; Mt 6:10; 2 Tim 2:12). This balanced understanding of the present and future fulfilment of the Scriptural prophecies and promises will keep us from many doctrinal errors prevalent today.

Here's a promise of God for a balanced Christian life. Isaiah 30:21, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it, whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left."

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