

Stopped in the Way

by William Edwin Boardman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of whole-souled consecration to God, and warns against half-and-half living and distorted ideas about what it means to serve God entirely.

Scripture: Exodus 3:2, Numbers 13:27, Matthew 14:29, Luke 9:23, John 8:36, Romans 8:31, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 5:1, Philippians 4:13, Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Faith And Trust"

Description

William Edwin Boardman preaches about the journey of conversion and the deeper work of grace, emphasizing the need to overcome doubts and obstacles in order to fully surrender to God. He compares the stages of faith to the journey of Abraham and the Israelites, highlighting the challenges of trusting God completely. Boardman addresses the struggle of conquering sin in the heart and the fear of fully trusting Jesus to transform our lives. He warns against being hindered by false ideas of consecration and the deception of rigid rules in serving God, urging believers to trust in God's strength and grace for complete surrender.

Transcript

It has been the Lord's way all along, to arrest the careless journeyer to the eternal world, at some point in his career, by some burning bush at the wayside, and then when turned aside to inquire about the matter, to press upon him the duties and privileges of the service of God.

And all along when so arrested and urged to take up the cross, it has been man's way, to conjure up a host of difficulties, as formidable as Pharaoh and his army to Moses; difficulties to be put down only by Him who convinced and persuaded Moses by the leprous hand and the changing serpent rod.

And what is true of the careless journeyer in reference to conversion, is equally true of the Christian pilgrim in reference to the second and deeper work of grace.

Indeed it often happens that it takes more to arrest and convince, in the second than in the first instance.

Abraham made his entrance upon the land of promise by two stages, first from Ur to Haran, and then from Haran to Canaan. Doubtless it cost many a sacrifice hard to make, and the sundering of many a tie hard to break, at the first, when with his father he left the land of his birth and the home of his youth, idolatrous though it was, to go forth into a strange land amongst strangers. But when, after the death of his father, at

Haran, the command of the Lord came to strike tent and go forth again, he knew not where, he had no father to lean upon, no dependence but God alone, and although his faith did not fail, yet doubtless the second command tried it more than the first.

The second is the higher stage, and more difficult too. It is really harder to overcome sin in the heart, than to break away from the world at first. And it is harder to come to the point of trusting in Jesus to subdue one's own heart entirely to himself, than to venture upon him for the forgiveness of sin. We are slower to perceive that the work of saving us from sin -- of expelling sin from us -- is Christ's, than to see that he has already suffered the penalty of sin and purchased our pardon.

The children of Israel braved the Red Sea, and passed it in triumph -- but the Canaanites in the land, in their armor of brass, and cities walled up to heaven, appalled them, and turned them back into the wilderness to wander forty long years, before they were prepared to set foot upon the land of promise.

Like them we have the two stages, and the two works, and both by faith, and both to learn.

They got not their inheritance by crossing the Red Sea alone. The Jordan must also be passed by faith between watery walls on either hand, before they could learn the lesson that by faith, they were to conquer their foes in the land, as well as gain deliverance from foes in Egypt. A hard lesson as it proved in their case, and many another. They were not stopped by the Red Sea, and they had their song of triumph upon the far bank overlooking the waters whose walls had opened to give them a dry passage, but closed upon their enemies and overwhelmed them. But when, in that same year, they came to the borders of Canaan and sent out their spies to view the land, and when the spies returned with their Eschol grapes, borne upon a pole between two of them, but reported giants, the sons of Anak in the land, and cities with walls great and exceeding high, they saw all through the magnifying glass of fear and were palsied: difficulties rose up and swelled out into the giant proportions of absolute impossibilities, and they turned from them and set their faces to go back into Egypt, and were about to murder Moses and Aaron. Nothing kept them from it but the terrible judgments of God.

Strange that they could not see, and know that the same hand that opened up the way out of the bondage of Egypt through the Red Sea and through the wilderness, could and would open up the way into the land of Canaan and subdue all their enemies under them. "The Sea," thought they, "God opened -- none but God could do that. But to conquer and subdue the land is our work, and we are not able to do it." So they shrunk back from it.

Just so it is with us. We break from the bondage of the world. We fly to the Saviour for pardon and find it. We are happy in it -- we have our song of triumph after the passage of the sea, and we go forward. Bitter waters are made sweet for us by the branch of the tree of life cast in. Manna is given us to feast upon by the way. The Rock gives us its living waters. The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire guide us all our journey through. But by and by the Canaanites in the heart begin to be seen and felt in their power. And when we begin seriously to think of their absolute subjection -- we think of it as a work to be done by us -- not the Lord, and we shrink back from it as hopeless, and content ourselves as well as we can with a life-long career of wandering in the wilderness, simply because our faith fails us to strike for victory, trusting in God alone to give it.

In this way multitudes are stopped, almost before they have started: just when they have come to see the land before them, but have not yet taken the first decisive step for its possession.

Already in endeavoring to take up the "stumbling stone" of perfectionism, one of the difficulties has been anticipated and answered: and in meeting the special personal plea, "not for me," another has been sufficiently discussed, if not effectually removed.

Others yet remain. God help us to see them, and conquer them too. Satan will hinder if he can.

Fear of the brand, is one great difficulty. Not merely the brand of "perfectionism" -- this aside -- we shrink from being marked as peculiar amongst Christians. We should not certainly greatly fear to wear the star of an earthly nobility, in some countries at least, but the star of nobility or knighthood in the army of Jesus is another thing.

Havelock fought three battles against terrible odds to gain his first honors from the Queen. But they were not his severest struggles nor his greatest victories. Many more he fought afterwards before he forced his way at last into Lucknow, but these were not his hardest contests either. The two battles with his three-fold foe, the world, his own heart, and Satan, the first on the General Kyd, and the last at Fort William were the most trying of his life. Especially the last, when he put on the whole armor of salvation, and determined to "stand up for Jesus," even though it should cost him the loss of all favor and friendship and promotion from the crown. To be branded a "saint" was another and a very different honor to look to, than to have the star of knighthood upon his breast, and the title, "Sir Henry, K. C. B.," prefixed and suffixed to his name.

But so it is. This battle must be fought, and he who conquers in it, comes to be willing to wear whatever title of reproach the world may see fit to confer. There is no victory without it.

Fear of becoming ultra. The danger of being led into fanaticism and error is another difficulty at the outset. And there is danger of this. Satan delights in nothing so much, if we will go forward, as to mislead us, or urge us on over the bounds of truth and wisdom out into the fields of extravagance and folly. Then, too, though old to the Bible, and to the experience of those who have gone before us, every step of real progress is new to us. We are blind to all before us, however clearly we see the ground already passed over, and our subtle enemy is always ready to decoy us into the specious network of some trap set for the unwary.

We cannot, therefore, be too careful. The fear is a wholesome one, for the danger is real. We are not without melancholy warnings in the many cases of those who have been duped in this way, and destroyed to all usefulness in this world. The following instance of

A SHAKERESS

is one of many like it in every essential respect, and a sad illustration of the danger in question.

She was no ordinary woman. Before she began the course which ended in her being buried alive in that Protestant American convent, a Shaker community, she was very discreet, very conscientious, very amiable, very everything apparently lovely and good. If not, like Anna, a widow of fourscore, she was yet a widow, and the widow of a respectable clergyman, with a circle of children and grand-children and friends around her, who loved and revered her. Of all women almost she seemed least in danger of being carried away from solid Scripture moorings out into the sea of fanaticism.

Yet so it was. She had her weak side; there was a broad streak of the imaginative in her; charming when it was kept in subjection to truth, but inclining her to fanciful applications of the word of God. She revered the Scriptures, and any idea, no matter how absurd, if yet it suited her own fancy, and was also couched in the

words of the Bible, she received as God's truth. She seemed to have forgotten that the devil can quote Scripture to his purpose. And this, her weakness, the tempter, who even tried the Master in the same way, was not slow to take advantage of.

The specious and fanciful interpretation of the Scriptures by the Millerites was the first to mislead her. She went so far as to prepare ascension robes, and await the moment of the Saviour's second coming upon the day fixed by the leader, Miller, himself. Then next she was induced to come out and denounce as deluded all who did not receive the Millerite interpretation of the Bible; and that as she supposed by the direct command of God. At a certain time, while meditating upon these things, the words "Come out of Babylon" sounded in her ears, and she settled it in a moment that it was the voice of God, commanding her to separate herself from her church, amongst whom were her own beloved children and the dearest friends she had in the world; and she came out and denounced them all.

After that again she was struck by the words, "Mortify the flesh," and from this she, with the little band of deluded ones whom she joined took up the idea that all they could do to mortify themselves before each other would be pleasing to God and purifying to themselves. And they carried the matter to the absurd and ridiculous extreme of placing themselves in all sorts of grotesque positions, or worse, in their meetings for worship. This finally went so far as to shock her delicacy, and drive her to renounce these Millerites in turn.

And what now? Adrift once more, did she not see her folly and turn again to the stronghold? No. But went further and fared worse than ever. Meeting on board one of the lake steamers, while crossing Lake Erie, a Shakeress, her fantastic dress and demure looks attracted her, and they soon fell into conversation. Many of the fancies of this Protestant nun found admiring reception from the widow. But of all others the assurance that all the faithful have each some one of their own dear departed relatives to go with them as guardian angels delighted her most.

And when her new friend said, "Does not the apostle ask, 'are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation?'" the truth of all was sealed and certain to the widow's belief, as if it had been a voice from heaven, instead of the Shakeress, speaking. She was fairly caught again. The net was of gossamer texture, but yet strong enough to bind her and hold her. The Shakeress drew her out to speak of her past history and of her departed friends, and soon learned that of all the loved ones she had been called to mourn, not one, not even her husband, was so dear to her memory as a favorite sister who had been dead many years.

Adroitly and demurely enough, after a while the Shakeress told the widow that her own guardian spirit, who was constantly with her had whispered that the favorite sister would henceforth attend the widow wherever she went, if she would listen to her voice in her heart and follow her counsels; and then left her to commune with her invisible attendant. Not, however, until she had taken good care to find out how much the widow was worth, and present before her in the most attractive form the question of taking all and going to the Shakers.

Left to herself, she set herself to listen to the angel voice of her invisible sister. Shall I sell all; break up, leave my children and grand-children and go? was the question silently asked. The answer as silently given was, If a man forsake not all that he hath he cannot be my disciple. If any one hate not father and mother and sister and brother he cannot be my disciple. Her fertile fancy at once took this as infallible counsel to sell all, take all and leave all and take the Shaker veil. Which she did.

Now it is in ways like this, that satan draws from the church the volunteer recruits, to keep that right wing of his army, the Fanatics filled up. With instances like this, and worse, around us, we do well to take heed. Let us beware first of all of taking impulse, or suggestions, or the inner light for our guide. Let us bring our own impulses and suggestions to the test of God's holy word. The inner light if it be not according to the revealed truth of God is only darkness. And if the light within us be darkness how great is that darkness. The mariner will hardly be so foolish as to supersede the chart, by following his own fancies upon the sea. If he should, however, some rock or shoal or reef or whirlpool would bring him up while he was sailing in fancied security and scatter his hopes and his cargo and the fragments of his ship with his crew and himself upon the raging waves of the deep. Satan has that man fairly in his snares, whom he can get to put his own suggestions or impulses, under any name whatever, whether of the inner light, or a guardian spirit or the Spirit of God in place of the Bible as the chart of faith and of life.

Let us make sure also that we have the Bible truth and not merely Bible words. It is a favorite and frequent thing with the arch deceiver to couch his own lies in words of the Scripture. He takes out and leaves behind the kernels of truth and catches the unwary with the empty chaff of mere Scripture phraseology. Beware of him.

But then, if common sense and common prudence do demand of us care lest we be deceived and ensnared, are we therefore to be stopped at the threshold of all that is good and great? No.

Rather let us be sure we are right, and then with our face as a flint, yet with the docility of the child, and with the firm tread of a mind made up and a faith leaning upon God, let us push resolutely forward to the conquest. There is just one thing that satan likes better than to lure us into fanaticism, and that is to frighten us back from any great step of real advancement into the wilderness of doubt, and the tortuous paths of unbelief and sin.

Many are stopped at the outset, by reluctance to give the world entirely up, and be wholly conformed to the will of Christ.

A moderate, reasonable, half and half life in the service of the Master they are willing to live. But to be wholly consecrated to God is more than they can consent to.

Perhaps they find the yoke of Christ heavy and galling to their necks, even when borne only in this their half and half sort of a way. And they reason by the arithmetic of unbelief which tells them that, if half and half service is all they can carry, then full service would be twice as heavy and would break them down altogether.

They fail to see that the Master gives grace and strength to those who are wholly given up to him, to "mount up as on eagles' wings, and to run without weariness, and walk without fainting."

They overlook the lessons of the past, that the Lord is the strength of those who lean wholly upon him, enabling them to pass through floods dry shod, and through fire seven times heated unscathed, to turn trials into joys, and even martyr flames into triumphs. While those who stop half way, in his service, are left with enemies around them unsubdued, unexpelled, ready to rise up and scourge them, whenever the Lord chooses to let it be done -- to humble them in the dust.

Suppose a husbandman, finding his fields over-run with the noxious "Canada thistle," should, instead of waging a war of extermination, and destroying it root and branch, only make half and half work of it, should

cut down part, and leave part to ripen seed and give to the winds for another crop, and so on and on from year to year.

And suppose he should justify himself to himself in this matter, by reasoning, that if it cost so much time and toil to keep the noxious things under from year to year, when all he attempted was only to keep them decently under, it would be more than he could do, if he should make the attempt, to keep them exterminated.

Such a farmer would make himself the laughingstock of the whole countryside. They would give him the title of "Canada Thistle" Smith or Johnson, or whatever his name might be. And many a homely hearty joke would be made at his expense.

But his reasoning would be -- no better it is true -- but just as good as that of the half and half disciple, who shrinks from whole souled consecration, because he thinks it would be so much harder than the half and half life he now lives.

But there are those who, though once willing, are now unwilling to be wholly given up to the service of Christ, hard or easy. They have not yet got enough of the world, though once they thought they had. The world has its charms for them which they are not willing to forego. Its bloom is not all shed. True they have enlisted under the banner of Christ, and in the hour of need they stand ready for the battle. They work manfully in revivals, and keep up the daily drill of closet and family worship, and the weekly duties of the sanctuary, and Sabbath school, and prayer meeting. And yet, after all; they are a sort of militia, not regulars; a citizen soldiery, ready to volunteer or be called out on occasion. Having arms and uniform hung up ready for use, but only put on and used when the occasion requires. And between whiles, attending to their citizen avocations as men of the world. And not willing at all to leave all, forsake kindred, and home, and business and all; or rather to consecrate all to the Lord, and make all subservient to the interests of his cause.

Upon such, argument will be lost. Let them take their course. They will learn by and by that Christ is made of God unto us wisdom, as well as righteousness. And that the world is folly and madness to all its votaries. Bitter in the mouth will it be to them, if at last God shall be obliged to cut down their gourds, and dash the cup of worldly pleasure from their hand.

These aside -- there is another class, nearly allied to those named already before these last, to be mentioned.

Those who would gladly give themselves wholly up to Christ, but are stopped at the threshold by false or distorted ideas of what a life of entire consecration to God is.

They have the view of it which has led hundreds of thousands to go into convents and monasteries. The idea that to serve God entirely, business must be abandoned for some sort of religious occupation. But a glance will unmask this deception. A glance will serve to show that there are thousands who are engaged in religious occupations who are not wholly consecrated to God. Some, alas, who are not Christians at all. While amongst the holiest people of the world there are some soldiers, some sailors, some merchants, some lawyers, some physicians, some mechanics, some wives, mothers, house-keepers.

The truth is, a man may preach for himself to get a living or gain a reputation, just as easily as a lawyer can plead for his fees or his fame. And a merchant can make money for his Master, or a house-keeper

meet her daily duties for the Lord just as well as a minister can study and teach for him.

Or they have taken up the notion that to be wholly consecrated, they must dress peculiarly -- never smile -- never make others smile -- must wear a sanctified look, and speak in a sanctified tone, and all that. Satan helps on these distorted views of consecration.

And there is one of the wise and good counsels of our Saviour that the adversary loves to pervert for this purpose -- "Count the cost." "Yes," says Satan, "Count the cost. Look the whole ground over. Take everything into view. Sum it all up. Lest haply having begun to build you shall not be able to finish, and lest having engaged in the battle you shall be put to the route."

The arithmetic he would have us use in counting the cost, is not that of figures. which cannot lie, but of fictions which cannot speak the truth. He would have us add together sacrifices, never demanded; duties, never required; and difficulties, never existing, into a fabulous sum, entirely too great for our resources to compass.

It would be useless for satan to ply us Protestants with the peculiarities urged upon Romanists. We could not be driven into petticoats, dignified as robes; nor to imprison ourselves in dungeons, called convents; nor to count beads, and call it prayers; nor to lash our own bare backs, thinking to scourge away sin. He plies us with notions more protestant, but not one whit less fictitious and deceptive. "Would you be a whole souled disciple of Christ," he says, "Your person: -- You will have to conform all your personal habits to a rigid rule first of all. You must put on the straight jacket of propriety tight-laced. It would ill become one wholly consecrated to God to wear ornaments or elegancies. Gold and jewelry and costly array must be wholly eschewed. Luxuries of the table must never be touched; superfluities, like tea and coffee, and everything else but the coarsest fare must be let alone, or rather denounced as a wicked waste of money.

Your reading must be solidly and only religious. Your associates must be Christians only, and those the best. Your conversation should never be gay. Your face should be solemn and your words measured. You should never smile yourself or cause others to do it. Every garment, every movement, every word, every tone of your voice, should tell all around you that you are holy in no common degree.

Then as to your home: carpets and curtains, parlor ornaments and table elegancies would ill become one who professes to be wholly given up to the Lord.

Bare floors, hard chairs, plain tables and mirrors, no pictures or expensive works of art, no elegant books, no costly comforts, but everything the plainest and cheapest would better suit your professions. It would never do for you to own fine carriages and splendid horses, or spend money and time in ornamenting your grounds.

And as to your church: You would have to see to it that minister and people should come up to your standard. Rebuke them, privately first, if they did not. Rebuke them publicly afterward, if they should not heed you at first. And, if still obdurate, denounce them and leave them. Exclude them from your fellowship. Testify against them in action as well as in words, and, if need be, set up on your own account, all alone, a church by yourself, and let the world have the benefit at least of the example of one who would have no fellowship with the works of darkness."

So he goes on from church relations to charities representing the demands of the gospel as oppressive and impoverishing in the extreme; and from charities to business, making it out an impossibility to pursue

any ordinary avocation upon strictly Christian principles: and from business to politics and from politics to social life, adding absurdity to impossibility, endlessly almost. It would be tedious to follow the arch arithmetician of lies in his sum of addition. It is enough to say that he never stops until he has thoroughly frightened the half-hearted disciple back from any attempt at compliance; or if determined to go ahead blindfold, has led him on into a sea of troubles, where he must perish, if the Master does not stretch forth his hand and save him.

It will be observed that this application of our Saviour's counsel to count the cost is a complete perversion. There is nowhere in the Bible one single line or precept of rigid requirement binding the Christian to any rigid rules about living and dress, or anything of the sort. Much less a single word, making such things a condition of salvation, whether of justification or sanctification. Christ is the free gift of God to sinners, and all who believe in him really and truly will be saved, whether arrayed like Solomon in his glory in purple and gold, or like John the Baptist in a coarse garment, with a heathen girdle; and whether, like Solomon, living in palaces of marble upon the delicacies of every clime, amid the spicery of the south and the jewels of the east, and the splendors of pencil and chisel, or living in a cave in the wilderness upon locusts and wild honey, as did the greatest of all the prophets.

The kingdom of God is not in meat and drinks, nor in broadcloth and satins, or plate and perfumery and jewels, nor in the absence of these things.

The truth is, that we are never really, entirely the Lord's freemen, until we are free from the trammels of all these trivial questions, and at full liberty to follow the Lord in whatever dress or position or business or company or circumstances the providence of God and our own judgment of proprieties and our own ability and taste may dictate or require.

One class more, and the last demanding notice, of those who are stopped at the outset, may be mentioned. There are some -- many it may be -- who would gladly follow the Lord wholly, like Joshua, and who have just views of what it is to be given up entirely to him, but who see not how they can be sustained in entire consecration, if they make it. They do not see the hand of God out-stretched to lift them up, and sustain them; and they dare not trust to his promise, and therefore they are afraid to start.

In some respects they are like Peter in the prison at Jerusalem. They are in bondage to sin, at least, as he was to the Romans; and they know it. Their chains they have felt binding them to the world, as he felt his binding him to the soldiers by either arm. Their prison-house of darkness, with its iron gate and mail-clad watcher, has enclosed them. And a hundred difficulties in armor of brass and arms of steel, like the four quaternions of soldiers shut them in.

In this situation the gospel comes to them as the angel of the Lord came to Peter, while he slept between his keepers -- and arouses them, saying, Arise, gird thyself and follow me.

But now comes a contrast.

The apostle arose, put on his sandals, begirt himself and followed, almost as in a dream. But they sit half up, in chains still, and say, "O these chains -- how are they to be broken off? And the soldiers on either side -- who shall free me from their weapons -- and the iron gate, with its iron doors, bolts and bars, and mail-clad watchers outside, and the hundred soldiers, and the great iron gate leading to the city, and the darkness of the way?" Alas for them. The difficulties in the way appall and palsy them. If they would but arise at the call of the gospel, give themselves up implicitly and entirely to follow the Lord Jesus, he would

go with them, and the way would open up in the light of his presence, and every enemy would sleep on, every barrier would swing wide open, all would go easy and delightfully. The whole way would be a way of happiness, and all the path a path of peace.

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