

(The New Covenant Servant) 3. the Lord Rebukes the Elders

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon addresses the Lord's rebuke of church elders for failing in their duties of devotion and leadership, emphasizing the need for authenticity and vigilance against false teachings.

Scripture: Revelation 2:1

Topics: "Spiritual Integrity", "Eldership"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the Lord's rebuke of the elders in the churches of Revelation, highlighting their failures in devotion, tolerance of worldly teachings, and hypocrisy. He points out that the elder in Ephesus lost fervent devotion to the Lord, while the elder in Pergamum allowed lax teachings that led to worldliness. The elder in Sardis was criticized for living on reputation rather than spiritual reality, and the elder in Laodicea was blind to his own wretchedness. Poonen stresses the importance of personal relationship with God over mere service, and the need for elders to lead by example, free from the love of money and the desire for human approval.

Transcript

Revelation Chapters 2 & 3, are good chapters for us to read because they contain the Lord's messages to the elder brothers (messengers) of churches. The Lord publicly rebuked the backslidden elders in five of the seven churches. He did not send "Personal and Confidential" letters to them through the apostle John, but letters that were to be read out to all the believers in those churches.

Ephesus - No Devotion to the Lord

The elder in Ephesus was rebuked, not for falling into some gross sin, but for losing that fervent devotion for the Lord that he had had in earlier days (Revelation 2:1-5). Perhaps he was now so taken up with preaching sermons every Sunday, that he had forgotten all about devotion to the Lord in his personal life. This was a serious error.

Satan always seeks to turn us away from "simple devotion to Christ" to something secondary (2 Corinthians 11:3). When our work for the Lord becomes more important to us than the Lord Himself, we have already started backsliding. All our labours for the Lord must flow out of our personal relationship with Him. Otherwise they will have no spiritual value. They will be but dead works and social service.

Whenever anything becomes more important to us than the Lord Himself, we can no longer be servants of the NEW covenant - for the new covenant emphasises A RELATIONSHIP WITH the Lord, unlike the old covenant that emphasised SERVICE FOR the Lord. If we have not understood this difference, we can never build the Body of Christ.

Pergamum - Worldly Teaching Tolerated

The elder in Pergamum was rebuked for allowing people to teach doctrines that led the church into worldliness and into a lax attitude towards sin (Revelation 2:14, 15). He himself may have been a good man. But he permitted others to teach Balaam's doctrine. So he was guilty.

The Lord holds elders responsible to ensure that no preaching is permitted in the church that leads people to take sin lightly. There is "a doctrine that leads to godliness" (to a godly, Christ-like life), and that alone is "hygienic teaching" (1 Timothy 6:3 - margin). Every other teaching is unhygienic to a greater or lesser degree.

Why did this elder permit such lax teachings in his church? Probably he never corrected the brothers and sisters for anything, because he wanted a reputation as a humble and gentle brother. If so, he sought his own honour more than the good of the church.

"Humility" and "gentleness" are virtues that we must learn from the example of Jesus, as He Himself told us to do (Matthew 11:29). Otherwise we can get a false understanding of what they mean.

Jesus' humility and gentleness did not prevent Him from driving the money changers out of the temple, or from rebuking Peter with strong words such as, "Get behind me Satan", when Peter preached a false doctrine, that Jesus should avoid the cross (Matthew 16:22, 23).

Satan can use even a good brother like Peter to lead the church astray. For that brother may speak in the meetings in such a way as to dilute the word of the cross. Such preaching must always be recognised as the voice of Satan - for thus Satan can turn the church away from the direction that God wants it to take.

One of the greatest responsibilities we have as elders of churches, is to determine the direction that our church should take. It must not be the direction of worldliness and compromise. Neither must it be the direction of Pharisaism and legalism. But it must be the way of the cross - the direction of the will of God.

Balaam-like preachers usually have great soul-power and can have an unhealthy influence on people in a church. Preachers who have a powerful human personality invariably overwhelm others, and hinder them from being connected to Christ as their Head. They also influence others in such a way as to lead them away from true spirituality, into superficial, worldly religiosity

When a preacher has not understood what it is to put his soul-power to death, he will connect believers to himself, and not to Christ the Head. The believers will admire and follow the preacher, but they will never overcome sin or the world in their lives.

There is a vast difference between spiritual power and soul-power, and we must be able to discern between the two. A person may have a lot of Bible-knowledge and a gift to speak. He may even be very hospitable to the brothers and sisters, and help them in many practical ways. But if he connects people to himself and not to Christ, he will be a hindrance to the building of the Body of Christ.

Balaam-like preachers are happy to receive gifts from others (Numbers 22:15-17). A gift can blind our eyes (Proverbs 17:8), and make us obligated to men, so that we become their slaves. That can hinder us from speaking the truth of God and correcting our benefactors.

A servant of God must always remain free. "You have been bought with a price. Do not become the servants of men." (1 Corinthians 7:23).

The teaching of Balaam flourished in the church in Pergamum because the elder there had become a slave of men.

Balaam's teaching has two parts to it. Peter mentions both of them in 2 Peter 2:14, 15 - covetousness and adultery.

Jesus said that the one who loves money HATES GOD, and the one who clings on to money DESPISES GOD (Read Luke 16:13 carefully).

If we don't teach that clearly, the teaching of Balaam will flourish in our church, and the brothers and sisters will be lovers of money.

But if we are to teach what Jesus taught, we must first be freed from the grip of money ourselves. It is easier to be freed from anger and from lusting with the eyes, than to be freed from the grip of money? Only through constant battle can we overcome this evil.

Have we seen the love of money as "a root of all sorts of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10)? While anger and lusting with the eyes are recognised as evils, the love of money is not. And thus many are enslaved to money, little realising that thereby they hate and despise God.

The vast majority of so-called "full-time workers" in India, are enslaved to the love of money, like Balaam. They visit the homes of rich believers, because they know that they will get gifts from them. And thus their mouths are shut when these rich and influential people have to be rebuked for their sins. They travel to preach in churches where they know they will receive handsome offerings. How can such preachers ever serve God? That is impossible. They are serving Mammon. Jesus said that no one could serve two masters.

There are three essential qualifications for anyone who wants to be a servant of God, under the new covenant:

He must be freed from sin in his personal life (Romans 6:22).

He must not seek to please men (Galatians 1:10).

He must hate and despise money (Luke 16:13).

We must check our lives constantly in these three areas to see whether we qualify to be servants of the new covenant or not.

Money and material things must have NO hold on our lives, if we are to be effective for God.

We must also hate to receive gifts, for Jesus said that "there is more blessing in GIVING than in RECEIVING" (Acts 20:35).

If we don't break free from the grip of money in our lives, we will never be able to love God or to serve Him, as we should. And we won't be able to lead others to love God. And we won't be able to deliver them from the teaching of Balaam.

The second aspect of the teaching of Balaam is immorality. This teaching encourages brothers and sisters to mingle freely with each other, without any restraint. We read in Revelation 2:14, that it was Balaam who encouraged the Moabite girls to mingle freely with the Israeli young men. This led to such immorality among the Israelites, that God slew 24,000 in a single day (Numbers 25:1-9).

Only when Phinehas lifted up a spear and put a stop to it, did God's anger against Israel cease. When God saw Phinehas's action, He was so pleased that he gave him the covenant of an everlasting priesthood (Numbers 25:11-13). God always honours those who are radical against the loose mingling of brothers and sisters in the church.

Here again, as elders, we must be examples, by our personal conduct. We must be serious in our behaviour with sisters and avoid all flippant and unnecessary conversation with them. We must be especially wary of those sisters who always want to speak to us. If we love to talk to the sisters, we are unfit to lead God's church. We must NEVER speak to women alone in a closed room. It is always best to counsel sisters along with one's wife, or with another elder brother.

When the disciples saw Jesus speaking to a woman at the well in Samaria, it is written that "they marvelled that He had been speaking with a woman" (John 4:27) - because Jesus usually never spoke to a woman alone. He was careful not to do anything that had even the appearance of evil. Here is the example for all of us to follow.

Thyatira - A Woman Running the Church

The Lord rebuked the elder at Thyatira for allowing a woman, Jezebel, (his "wife" - Revelation 2:20 - margin), to have such a strong influence in the affairs of the church that many brothers were being led astray. There are servants of God like that even today, who cannot restrain their wives and other sisters from interfering in church matters.

God has not called women to have any part in the leadership of new-covenant churches. That is taught clearly in 1 Timothy 2:12. But there are strong sisters everywhere who would like to have an influence in the running of their churches. All such women are Jezebels. Sisters are called to be "workers at home" (Titus 2:5). But if they begin to have a say in church matters, then there will be confusion in the church. An elder's wife can influence her husband so powerfully at home that all that he says in the elders' meetings will be but an echo of what she has drummed into his head at home!!

Elders like that are effeminate and totally unfit to be servants of God. Such elders must be categorised as women, and are therefore unfit to hold any positions of leadership in the church.

Sardis - Living on One's Reputation

The Lord rebuked the elder in Sardis for being a hypocrite. He had a name before people that he was alive, when in reality, he was spiritually dead. There were a few however in the assembly in Sardis who were wholehearted and zealous, who had kept their garments pure. It is indeed a sad state of affairs when other brothers in the assembly are more God-fearing than the elder.

The elder in Sardis may have got a name for himself through his preaching and through testifying to the great things God had done through him. We may experience wonderful miracles in our ministry. But there is a real danger when we begin to speak about them.

If you look at the example of Jesus, you will notice that He never spoke about such matters. He never testified anywhere about the miracles that He had done elsewhere. He preached God's Word and never spoke about what the Father had done through Him. All His righteousness and His works were done in secret before His Father.

Jesus must have had some amazing experiences with His Father, during the 30 years that He spent in Nazareth. But He never spoke one word about any of them. He knew that they were all to be kept secret. He never sought to make a name for Himself before others. Let us make Jesus our Example in this matter too.

When we give a testimony, it is very easy for dishonesty and exaggeration to creep in. We may tell others about someone who was healed through our prayer, for example, but never tell them about the hundred others whom we prayed for who were not healed. In such cases, we are not speaking the whole truth.

We must be thoroughly honest if we are to be the Lord's servants. Others must never get a better impression of us than what we actually are. It is far better if they think less of us.

And those who boast of spiritual gifts that they don't really have, are like deceptive clouds that don't bring the needed rain (Proverbs 25:14).

Are you really such a great man of faith as you have made yourself out to be to others? Consider the times when you have been anxious. Were you such a great man of faith then? Does your wife (who knows you better than anyone else) consider you to be a great man of faith? Most elders who have a name before others do not have much of a name before their own wives, who know them as they really are!!

Why are we afraid to let others see us as we really are? Isn't it because we want to appear superior to them? And when we do confess our failures, do we confess only "holy sins" such as the fact that we are not praying enough or not fasting enough etc.?

Such confessions are hypocritical and are only designed to increase one's reputation! All such hypocritical elders need to repent.

We must also remember that we will always produce children exactly like ourselves. It says about Adam that "he became the father of a son in HIS OWN LIKENESS" (Genesis 5:3). There are weaknesses in our bloodstream that others are not able to see, except under a powerful microscope. But we still transmit them to our children.

It is the same spiritually. There can be areas of failure in our lives that others may never see. But over a period of time, we will find that our spiritual children have got the same weaknesses too.

Every church finally becomes like its leader. That is why the seven letters in Revelation 2 & 3 are first of all addressed to the messengers of the churches, and then it says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says TO THE CHURCHES".

If we are secretly dishonest, we will ultimately produce dishonest brothers and sisters. If we are secretly lustful or miserly, that is how others in our church will finally turn out to be as well. The only exceptions will be those who have the discernment to see through our carnality and who do not follow our example.

There were some wholehearted young believers like that in Sardis, who did not become like their elder, because they saw through his carnality and did not follow his example.

One of the greatest deceptions that we can be in, is to imagine that we are building the true church, when we are motivated by the spirit of Babylon - to make a name for ourselves.

The origin of Babylon (the false church described in Revelation 17 & 18) is found in the tower of Babel.

At Babel, the people said to one another, "Let us build something that will get us a name" (Genesis 11:4). That is the essence of Babylon.

Has God prospered our work? Have we got a name for ourselves through our work for the Lord? Then there can come all unconsciously a feeling in our hearts that we have been faithful, unlike others who have been unfaithful. One of the easiest ways to go down into spiritual death is through such self-congratulation.

That is how Nebuchadnezzar fell, and began to behave like an animal. Read Daniel 4 and meditate on it, for it has a much-needed message for us all. There Nebuchadnezzar thought within himself, "Is this not Babylon which I myself have built?" (Daniel 4:30). Notice there that he didn't say that to anyone. He only had such thoughts in his heart. But God judged him immediately and made him insane.

That is how many preachers and elders have fallen from grace through the centuries. He who has ears to hear let him hear - and let him beware lest the same fate befall him too.

How will God humble a servant of His who has such high thoughts about himself and about his labours for the Lord?

He will begin to discover carnality within his own heart and in his church. He will find himself defeated in his thought-life, and loving money. There will be friction between some of the brothers in the church. The family-lives of many in the church will begin to deteriorate. There will be no spirit of prophecy in the church, even after many years. The meetings will be dull and boring. No leadership will develop in the church apart from the lone elder at the top!!

Seeing all this, the elder will begin to realise that there is not much spiritual content either in him or in his church. Perhaps his assembly has grown in numbers, but not spiritually. On the contrary, there is every evidence of spiritual death.

Most elders, when they see such things, will conceal them from others, and pretend that everything is all right in the church. And thus they will degenerate and become exactly like the elder in Sardis.

We don't have to wait many years to discover such things. God can give us discernment, so that we see these things in ourselves and in the church very quickly. But God will give us discernment only if we seek His honour alone, and don't care for the honour of men.

We must remember that God is not impressed by the numerical growth of a church, if it is not growing spiritually.

Paul told the Christians at Corinth that God would humble him, through their carnal state (Read 2 Corinthians 12:20, 21). Why should Paul feel humiliated by the carnality of the Corinthians?

Because Paul was their spiritual father. And God holds fathers responsible for the spiritual state of their children.

When we see carnality in our assembly, God is showing us our own failure as leaders. We are the ones who should humble ourselves then, instead of blaming the brothers and sisters. When we see worldliness in our children, God is showing us our failure as fathers. We must humble ourselves, instead of blaming our children.

If we are hirelings, we will criticise the brothers and sisters when we see their failings. But if we are men of God, we will humble ourselves and say, "Lord I have failed. Forgive me."

Paul had a great burden that the heathen whom he had brought to Christ should be "so sanctified that they could be offered up as pure offering to God" (Romans 15:16).

Under the old covenant, the priest had to examine every sacrifice that the people brought, to see that it was without any blemish (Deuteronomy 17:1). That was the priest's responsibility. He could not offer to God what was maimed in any way. (Read Malachi 1 & 2 to understand how serious a sin that was in God's eyes).

Now under the new covenant, all those whom the Lord calls to His service in the church have the same task. The people they present to God must be acceptable to Him. That was why Paul laboured "to present EVERY man perfect in Christ" (Colossians 1:28).

At the judgment seat of Christ, everything will become manifest. What profit will it be to us even if everyone thinks we are doing a great work for God, if in that day it is seen that all our labours were shallow and carnal? The elder in Sardis was foolish to be satisfied with man's honour.

Do we desire to get a name for ourselves - through our children? Maybe it's going well with them. Praise the Lord for that. But do we want others to notice that, so that we get some glory from it ourselves? Do we want others to know what wonderful fathers we have been? Are we bringing up our children for our own glory or God's?

Certainly, we all want to bring up our children to be wholehearted Christians. But shouldn't it be enough if God sees that? And if God has seen it why do we want any man's approval?

What does it matter even if others think our children are worldly? We have to answer to God alone ultimately.

It is good to have a sober estimate of ourselves and of our church.

There is a great lust in the flesh to show others the result of our labours. If we don't put that lust to death, Satan will always take advantage of us. Wherever he sees the slightest desire in any elder's heart to get a name for himself, Satan will take advantage of him, and deceive him, even while he is preaching about discipleship, holiness and the Body of Christ.

Such an elder will build only another branch-church of Babylon!

It is impossible to build the Body of Christ, if we are seeking a name for ourselves. The only one who can build a new covenant church is the one who has no desire for name or fame among men.

If there are only 3 wholehearted disciples in your church after many years of labour, because you refused to make the narrow gate any wider than a needle's eye, you don't have to be ashamed of that. God will say to you one day, "Well done, good and faithful servant".

It is far better to have 3 disciples in a town who are a pure testimony for Christ, than 3000 compromisers through whom the Name of the Lord is blasphemed.

But when our numbers are small, we can be tempted strongly to lower our standards, in order to impress others with better statistics. If we don't battle that lust, we will end up like the elder in Sardis.

I want to add a word of warning here however, to those leaders who may find a false comfort in these words.

It is possible that your church is not growing in numbers, because God Himself cannot recommend it to other needy people.

It is the Lord Who adds to the church (Acts 2:47). And in the early days, He did add large numbers to the church (Acts 6:7).

It may be good for you to pray something like this:

"Lord, we are not asking You to increase the numbers in our church with a multitude of compromisers. But we do pray for ALL those in this town, who are seeking to live a godly life. Lord, please do one of these three things:

LEAD THEM TO US so that we can help them; or

LEAD US TO THEM; or

SHOW US WHY YOU CAN'T RECOMMEND US to them."

The Lord may then tell you that He cannot recommend your church to others, because it is so legalistic and cold and Pharisaical!! He may also tell you that the reason why your church is like that is because you yourself are like that as an elder!!

Then the only thing for you to do is to mourn and repent.

If we want to be free from seeking the honour and approval of men in our ministry, the only way to do that is by building up a bridal relationship with the Lord. In The Song of Solomon, the bride speaks of her life and work as a garden that produces fruit for her Bridegroom alone (Song of Solomon 4:16b). When our goal is to satisfy our heavenly Bridegroom alone, then our heart will be at rest, at all times.

We will rest content in knowing that our Lord has accepted us just as we are, with all our limitations. We will realise that He does not expect us to have a ministry like anyone else. Thus we will be free from the spirit of competition that is rife in Christendom. We will also be free from the lust to report the results of our work to others.

The Lord has given us the gifts that are necessary for our unique contribution to the Body of Christ, and He has given us a specific task to complete. We are to fulfil that task to the best of our ability, by His grace and power, and we are not to let anyone else know about what we are doing for Him - just like a bride does not want anyone else to know the things that she does secretly for her bridegroom!

So, let us build a bridal relationship with our Lord, lest we end up like the elder in Sardis.

Laodicea - Not Knowing One's Wretchedness

The elder in Laodicea was rebuked strongly by the Lord for a number of reasons.

He felt he was rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. Riches are not related only to money. One can be rich in knowledge, gifts and talents too - and thus feel self-sufficient.

Those who are intelligent, eloquent and gifted need to walk with fear, because they are in constant danger of being proud of these human abilities and of depending more on them than on the Lord.

The elder here was satisfied with his Bible-knowledge, his gifts, his achievements, and his position as an elder. But he was not aware of the fact that in God's eyes, he was still spiritually "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17). It is sad indeed when we are ignorant of our true spiritual condition, as God sees us.

While this elder brother was totally ignorant of the fact that he was a wretched man, we find a godly man like the apostle Paul crying out and saying, "O wretched man that I am" (Romans 7:24).

How did Paul know his own wretchedness and the Laodicean elder not know his? Because Paul lived before God's face, while the Laodicean elder did not. In God's light, Paul constantly realised that his flesh was corrupt (Romans 7:18). Thus Paul remained constantly poor in spirit, and became a godly man. The Laodicean elder however, not seeing the wretchedness of his flesh, became carnal and lukewarm.

It is very easy for self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency to come into the life of a servant of God, if he does not live before God's face - for he will not see his own need. And evidence of this will be seen in the way he speaks and preaches. The way a needy person speaks is quite different from the way a strong self-sufficient person speaks.

There are gifted preachers who can speak well, who are eloquent, and who know the doctrine well. But if you listen to their spirit when they speak, you will be able to sense an arrogance there. They speak as experts, and not as those who are poor and needy themselves.

The Body of Christ cannot be built by men who have a strong, arrogant spirit, but only by men who have a humble, gentle spirit.

It is easy for an arrogant preacher to whip people in his sermons!! Then he becomes like the servant Jesus spoke of, whose master had appointed him to give others their daily ration of food. But instead of giving them food, he whipped them (Luke 12:45)! Unfortunately, there is a lot of whipping that goes on from the pulpit in Christendom today. Whipping never leads anyone to a godly life, but only to feelings of condemnation, and to subservience to the preacher who whips him.

Consider how a poor, helpless beggar speaks to anyone. It is always with meekness and respect - because he knows that he is a nobody in the world. That is how the Bible tells us to speak to all human

beings, for we too are nobodies in the world (1 Peter 3:15). On the other hand, how does a dictator speak? Always with arrogance.

Does our speech come from poverty of spirit or from arrogance?

1 Peter 2:17 commands us to "honour all men". Is there a single human being on earth who is excluded from that command? No.

A brother who is not eloquent, and who does not know much of the Word, but who has a humble, gentle spirit, will build the Body of Christ far more than an arrogant brother who is gifted and eloquent.

The gifted brother may look like a spiritual man here on earth, and others may even consider him to be a great asset to the church. But at the judgment seat of Christ it will be seen that it was the humbler brother who actually built the Body of Christ.

It is essential that we realise that the Body of Christ is built, not by Bible-knowledge and spiritual gifts primarily, but by our life.

Only the poor in spirit can build the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:3). And there is only one way to remain poor in spirit (aware of our own spiritual need) constantly, and that is, by looking at Jesus always.

When we see ourselves in His light, we will realise how unlike Him we are, even if we are better than others around us. In His light, we will lose sight of the weaknesses of others, and see only our own. And we shall spontaneously say, "Oh, wretched man that I am" (Romans 7:24). We won't have to be prompted by anyone to say it.

But we must live in that state always. Otherwise we can easily backslide into the deep pit of lukewarmness, carnality and arrogant pride that the Laodicean elder was in.

Under the old covenant, the high-priest could go into the Most Holy Place only once a year. He could see the glory of God, and his own wretchedness in that glory only once a year. But now that the new and living way has been opened by Jesus (Hebrews 10:20), we can live in the Most Holy Place, in the presence of God all the time - and see the wretchedness of our flesh all the time, like Paul did.

The old covenant prophets could see the glory of God only once in a while. When Isaiah saw it, he cried out saying, "Woe is me, for I am ruined" (Isaiah 6:5). But now we have the privilege of getting that revelation continuously. We can constantly cry "Woe is me", instead of pronouncing woes on others!! Those who live in the Spirit will see their need constantly and remain poor in spirit at all times.

Only a man who is poor in spirit is really spiritually wealthy in God's eyes. And when such a man speaks to us, either in personal conversation or in a meeting, we can partake of his spiritual wealth.

An eloquent preacher who is not poor in spirit however, can only show us pictures of wealth. He cannot make us actually wealthy.

We must give the poor in spirit the most prominent places of ministry in our assembly - and not the most gifted ones. Gifted brothers, who are not poor in spirit, can destroy the church.

The church cannot be destroyed by adulterers and thieves - because these people are such obvious sinners that everyone can recognise them as such. But the church can be destroyed by eloquent

preachers and gifted teachers who, like the Laodicean elder, have no sense of their own need, and who yet preach about holiness.

If we are unable to discern between those who are poor in spirit and those who are arrogant in spirit, the reason could be that we ourselves are not poor in spirit. As elders, if we don't see our own need first, how can we ever help others to see their need?

Oh how we need to pray that God will give us light on ourselves first, if we are to keep our assemblies pure for the Lord.

Hearing the Lord Directly

It is sad to note that these five elders were so deaf that they could not hear the Lord speak to them directly. The Lord had to rebuke them through the apostle John. Why was that necessary in the new covenant age? It was only under the old covenant that people had to hear God's message through a prophet. If these elder brothers had been humble and God-fearing, they could have heard God speaking directly to them, without John having to write to them.

And after these elders got these letters from John, we don't know whether they repented or not. We can only hope they did. I wonder if the elder in Thyatira told his wife to mind her own business and to keep her nose out of church matters. Or did she tell her husband not to bother about John's letter?

If these five elders did accept the Lord's rebukes through John, then it must certainly have gone well with them.

We do know however that at least one elder in another church did not accept what John wrote. John writes in 3 John about Diotrephes, who loved his position as an elder, and who would not accept John's correction (3 John 9).

If we are to serve the Lord, we must see ourselves at all times as the Lord sees us - and not as our brothers see us. God's Word can protect us from every spiritual danger, if we live before God's face constantly and listen to the voice of His Spirit - either when He speaks to us directly or when He speaks to us through another brother.

Finally, remember that the Lord never rebukes us to condemn us for our past failures, but always to give us a better future.

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