

Place Lurgan Baptist 10:8:2008

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

Reading 1 Peter 3:1-12

10. GROWING UP

I wonder when you reflect on your difficult and perhaps rebellious years as a teenager, can you recall receiving any reprimands from your seniors. Do you remember when you were going on and on and letting folk know how much you knew someone stepping in and saying, “**Shut up.**” Do you recall at times acting like a spoilt child and someone saying to you, perhaps your parents “**Grow up.**” Though difficult on occasions it’s usually easier to manage the first than the second. En route to maturity we all spill our milk, say things we shouldn’t and fail to act our age. At times we act like a young child throwing a temper tantrum. At other times we go through sweeping mood swings like an awkwardly adjusting teenager. This process is called “*growing up.*” Sooner or later we all have to do it. Chuck Swindoll says. “*The problem is, how do we know whether we are grown up ? Does it mean that our hair starts to turn gray ? No, that means we are growing older but not necessarily wiser.*” Sure we all have met folk with white hair who still act like babies. My signs of aging do not necessarily mean we are showing signs of maturity.

You see, we cannot tell from the outside whether we are maturing. I mean, how do you know that you are more mature this year than last year ? Has living twelve months longer made any difference ? *We know that we are growing older but how do we know that we are growing up ?* And is growing up what the Lord wants from us ? Maybe He just wants us to live in His family, sort of kind of exist between now and eternity and then He will take us home. Perhaps all this singing about “*a higher plane than I have found,*” is unrealistic. I don’t think so, for maturity is stated objective for every Christian. Do you recall that the writer to the Hebrews tackles this very subject when he takes his readers to task for their lack of maturity. They had grown older in the faith, but they had not grown up. He says, “*For when the time ye ought to teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*” (Heb 5:12)

Do you notice the Lord’s concern that some seem constantly immature ? “*ye are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*” We would say, “*You’re back on baby food.*” As we grow older in many ways we revert to childhood. Physically, we age, grow weak, our bodies deteriorate. But spiritually, immaturity is something we cannot allow. ***God wants us to get beyond the ABCs of the faith, to quit playing with blocks and sucking milk and wanting to be entertained.*** Leave the things that mark infancy and get on with a grown up lifestyle. Now, how do we know that we are growing up ? Well, Peter gives us here a spiritual growth chart, to help

know us know we are growing up and getting on in our spiritual lives. Do you see how he begins in (3:8)? He says “ *Finally.* ” The word means “ *to sum up.* ” It does not mean the end of the letter, but the conclusion of this section. He has spoken about our submission to the state (2:13-17) our submission to our employer (2:18-20) the wife’s submission to her husband, and now he gives all believers a general exhortation which will open to them the life of blessing that God desires for them to enjoy. My do you want to love life and see good days ? Do you desire that “ *every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before ?* ” Do you want to become a mature believer ? Then here is the first thing.

(1) CULTIVATE CHARITY

You see, everything begins with the right attitude. Love is a recurring theme in Peter’s letter. (1:8, 22, 3:8) Not only God’s love for us but our love for others. Have you a kindly attitude towards others ? This will be seen in five spiritual virtues that Peter mentions here. He begins with,

(a) UNITY:

“ *Be ye all of one mind.* ” (1:8) Now of course this does not mean uniformity rather it means cooperation in the midst of diversity. F. B. Meyer well said, “ *this oneness of mind does not demand the monotony of similarity, but unity in variety.* ” Take for example your body. You see, there is variety in the human body, from the eye lash to the foot, from the hand to the nose, yet all in this variety each part of the body is conscious of an indivisible unity.

Is this not the way it ought to be in the local church ? The early church was a model of visible oneness. Indeed in the history book of the early church, the book of Acts we find this recurring theme “ *They were all with one accord.* ” (Acts 2:1) No division, no backbiting, no schisms, but a church operating under the Lordship of Christ in the power of the Spirit, with one accord. *This does not mean that God’s people always agree, but though we may disagree we should always disagree agreeably.* Putting aside personal preferences, petty differences in view of our common love for Christ, our common concern for the lost, and our common hope of His return. How mature are you in the area of unity ? Are you at harmony with other believers in the family of God ? Are you one who works well with others ? A man was visiting an insane asylum one day and he noticed that all the insane people were on the field outside, but there was one guard. He asked the guard. “ *Are you afraid ?* ” The guard said, “ *Absolutely not.* ” He said, “ *Don’t you believe since you are the only here those people could overthrow and break out of this place ?* ” The guard said, “ *that’s impossible.* ” The man replied, “ *why ?* ” “ *Because lunatics don’t unite.* ” (a)

(b) SYMPATHY:

The word “ *compassion,* ” is made of two Greek words. “ *Com,* ” which means “ *with,* ” and “ *passion,* ” which means to feel. So the word “ *compassion,* ” means “ *to feel with.* ” And Peter is saying that in the body of Christ, if we are to live happily in the family of God we must be people who have compassion, those who can “ *feel with,* ” believers who have burdens. It’s the word from which we

get our English word “ *sympathy*.” Paul states it well in the book of Romans when he says, “ *Rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep.*” (12:15-16) Now it is rather easier for us to weep with those who weep, than to rejoice with those who rejoice isn’t it ? One thing is clear, sympathy and selfishness cannot co-exist. So long as self is the most important thing in the world, there can be no such thing as sympathy. You see, sympathy depends on the willingness to forget self, to step outside of self and to identify oneself with the sorrows and successes of others. I’ve heard it said, “ *maturity begins to grow when you can sense your concern for others outweighing your concern for yourself.*” A little girl returned home after with a friend for some time. She said “ *Mummy Jane was very, very sad because her kitten died. But Mummy I helped her feel better.*” Her mother said, “ *Well, what did you do ?*” And the little four year old girl said, “ *I just cried with her.*”

My do you enter the feelings of another believer ? When others hurt, do you hurt ? When they enjoy life do you enjoy it with them ? When the Lord blesses them with material prosperity or promotion, do you rejoice with them or do you envy them ? When they lose, do you feel the loss with them, or do you feel just a tiny pinprick of satisfaction ? Are you growing up spiritually ? Well, are you marked by unity, by sympathy, ? And then, by,

(c) **FRATERNITY:**

Peter says, “ *love as brethren.*” (3:8) And this is the word from which we get our English word Philadelphia.

Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love. And Peter is saying that believers ought to be committed to love one another. Did you know that this is one of the great testimonies of the reality of the Christian faith ? Christ said “ *by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another.*” (Jn 13:34) Brotherly love. The love of an affectionate friend. The poet Samuel Coleridge once described friendship as “ *a sheltering tree.*” You see, when you have this quality the branches of your friendship reach out over the lives of others giving them shelter, shade, rest, relief and encouragement. Longfellow wrote, “ *Ah ! How good it feels the hand of an old friend.*” Isn’t that so true ? I mean friends give comfort. When some trial occurs in our life, we pick up the phone and call a friend for we need the comfort they will provide. Are you cultivating such friends ? Are you being a friend ? Are there a few believers who will stand near you sheltering you with their branches ? Peter says, “ *love as brethren, be pitiful,*” that’s the next virtue,

(d) **PITY:**

The Greek term can also be translated “ *compassionate,*” and is used in the gospels to describe the Lord Jesus. “ *But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd.*” (Matt 9:36) As a good shepherd the Saviour looked at humanity’s lost sheep who were scattered, frightened and hungry. What He saw pulled at His heartstrings. He was full of tenderness for them. Do you have a heart sensitive to the needs of others. You know, it’s possible in the

(2) REPUDIATE CARNALITY

society which we live to become desensitized. We turn on the television and watch the news and see starving children, dead bodies, bloody scenes and if you are not careful you can develop hardness in your heart. Vance Havner once said that “*the Christian ought to develop a hide as tough as a Rhino and a heart as tender as a baby but the trick is how to toughen the one without toughening the other.*” Do you know one of the sweetest verses in the Bible ? “*Jesus wept.*” (Jn 13:35) Now Jesus Christ was God and He knew that in a few moments He would fill their hearts with joy for He would raise Lazarus from the dead. Yet the Bible says, “*Jesus wept.*” Why did He do that ? Because He had a heart that was full of pity, He was touched with the things that touch people, He was broken over the things that hurt people. Do hurting people touch your heart ? If they do, it’s a definite sign of spiritual growth. Unity, Sympathy, Fraternity, Pity, and then,

(e) HUMILITY:

“*Be courteous,*” really means “*be humble-minded,*” after all humility is the foundation for courtesy, for the humble person puts others ahead of himself. An attitude of lowliness. Now you see humility is a very illusive virtue, for the moment you think you have got humility you have lost it. Did you hear about the fellow at church one time who was awarded the humility badge for being the humblest man in church ? They took it away from him because he wore it. What is a sure sign that I am growing up spirituality ? (1)

Now the Bible speaks of the natural man, the carnal man, and the spiritual man. Carnality speaks of that which is of the flesh, ungodliness, that which is the opposite of spirituality. Do you see how Peter piles up the negatives here reminding us of how is easy to act in a carnal way. Do you want to know if you are a mature believer this ...? Well, a mature Christian is known,

(a) BY WHAT HE DOES:

Peter expresses it in negatives.

1. There is no RETALIATION:

Look if you will at (3:9) That word “*rendering,*” means “*giving back,*” “*for,*” means “*in exchange for.*” We are not to give back evil in exchange for evil, insult in exchange for insult rather we are to return good for evil. You see, as believers we can live on one of three levels. We can return evil for good which is the Satanic level. We can return good for good and evil for evil which is the Human level, or we can return good for evil which is the Divine level. Was this not the level on which our Lord lived ? You see, not only did Christ teach, “*love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you,*” (Matt 5:44) but He practiced it. Indeed Peter says “*Who when He was reviled, reviled not again.*” (2:23) My has He not left us an example that we should walk in His steps ? And when we do so we will inherit a blessing. For when we are constantly blessing

others we are constantly blessed ourselves. Is not what the martyrs discovered ? That persecution can be a time of spiritual enrichment, for as they blessed their enemies God Himself blessed them. What is a sure sign that I am maturing ? When I stop fighting back. When I take the chip off my shoulder. When I stop working on my sarcastic jab. 1.

2. There is no TOLERATION:

No toleration of sin for he “ *eschews evil,*” that is he shuns it. It means you avoid something because you despise and loathe it. It is not enough for us to avoid sin because sin is wrong we ought to shun it because we hate it. “ *Eschew evil,*” for “ *who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord ? Or who shall stand in His holy place ? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul to vanity nor sworn deceitfully.*” (Ps 24:3-4) 1,2

3. There is no RESERVATION:

No holding back from doing good. My do you want to experience good days, days of blessing ? Do you want a satisfied life ? Then follow Him of who it was said, “ He went about doing good.” (Acts 10:38) You know the contemporary notion of the good life is “ *doing your own thing,*” just whatever feels good. That’s what Earnest Hemingway the famed novelist did. His literary talent brought him fame, prestige, money, which allowed him to seek pleasure all over the world through hunting and fishing expeditions, celebrity parties, heavy drinking, sleeping with women wherever he went. However, none

of that gave him satisfaction. He ended his life tragically one day in 1961 when he shot himself in the head. Do you realize that the “ *good life,*” is only found in obedience to God’s will ? Here Peter is telling us that a mature believer is known by (a) and then,

(b) BY WHAT HE SAYS:

Look at (3:10) if you will. The tongue, what a battle. Teaching and warnings about the tongue are threaded throughout the Bible. In fact, in this verse and the one that follows Peter is quoting from (Ps 34:12-16) Here he says to “ *refrain your tongue from evil.*” The psalmist puts it a little more forcefully when he says “ *Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile.*” The idea is to get control of your tongue, or as James puts it, put a bridle on it. It’s the picture of holding it back from galloping headlong into greater sin. Show me a person who has learned to control his tongue, who has learned to refrain from gossip, who has learned to refrain from making unverified statement and I will show you a believer who is well on his way to maturity. Do you really want to love life ? To see days of blessing ? Then control your tongue. Life will be easier for you, happier for you, richer for you. But some never learn the lesson. Do you recall the classic grave marker that is found on some old grave in England ?

**Beneath this stone a lump of clay
Lies Arabella Young
Who on the twenty fourth of May
Began to hold her tongue**

Will it take death to control your tongue ? It need not. Pray that the Lord will control your tongue starting today. Make the prayer of David your prayer as you begin each new day. “ *Set a watch O Lord before my mouth, keep the door of my lips.* ” (Ps 141:3) Now how are you doing when it comes to growing up spiritually ? You see, a mature believer is known (a) (b) and,

(c) BY WHAT HE THINKS:

“ *Let him seek peace and ensue it,* ” (3:11) Does this not suggest the value of correct thinking ? Surely, it is plain that to ensue or pursue peace is possible only as there “ *perfect peace,* ” in the mind. For as man “ *thinketh in his heart so he is.* ” (Prov 23:7) God seeks “ *ensue peace,* ” the Lord Jesus says, “ *peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you.* ” (Jn 14:27) The Lord has provided the peace, will you not trust him for it ? When we learn to cast our burdens on the Lord and enjoy His peace ? When will we known as peacemakers, those who strive for harmony with others without compromising the truth ? (Matt 5:9 Rom 12:18) Now look, we are talking about spiritual maturity. How are you doing ? Are you growing up spiritually ? Well, these are the checkpoints. (1) (2)

(3) APPRECIATE DEITY

You see, having given us the checklist for spiritual maturity Peter tells us that the Lord is watching us and listening to us. Why ? Because He cares about us displaying these qualities. (3) Do you appreciate the

Lord ? How does that appreciation show itself ? *What about your communion with Him ?* Have you been communing with Him this past week ? If, you have, has it been real ? *What about your obedience to Him ?* Do you take seriously His commands ? His command to remember Him in the breaking of bread ? To obey Him in the matter of believers baptism ? To respect Him in the matter of church membership ? To value Him in the matter of tithing ? *What about your service for Him ?* You say, you appreciate the Lord, well, what do you do for Him ? Anything, or do you just warm a seat and be a spectator. We need to appreciate the Lord. Why ? Well,

(a) THE LORD IS WATCHING OVER US:

“ *The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous,* ” *the eyes of the Lord,* ” is a common Old Testament phrase that refers to God’s special, caring watchfulness over His people. (Prov 5:21 Zech 4:10) Though we may feel forsaken at times He promises never to leave us or forsake us. A little boy who lived in the northern part of the U.S.A. was eagerly looking forward to the birthday party of his friend who loved a short distance away. When the day arrived a fierce blizzard was making driving dangerous. But the little boy insisted that did not matter he would walk to his friends house, and he would do it all by himself he didn’t need any help from his Dad. His father hesitated. “ *But Dad,* ” he persisted “ *all the other kids will be there, their parents are letting them go.* ” Finally, the father agreed. Overjoyed the little boy bundled up for the trip and plunged into the storm. The swirling snow sometimes made it difficult for him to see and it took 30 minutes of

trudging through the snow to get there. But finally he was there. He climbed the porch steps and reached up top the ring the door bell. As he did he turned briefly to look back behind him, and out of the corner of his eye he saw the form of a retreating figure. *It was his Dad who had followed him all the way to make sure that he arrived at his destination. His father's eye was ever upon him.* My regardless of your circumstances this the Lord is there. He sees, He knows, He undertakes.

(b) THE LORD IS LISTENING TO US:

“ *And His ears are open unto their prayers,* ” (3:12) the word for “ *prayer,* ” means “ *entreaty, supplication.* ” It conveys the idea of believers crying out for God to meet their needs. (Ps 5:2 Matt 7:7) My we have a blessed privilege. We can come to the Throne of Grace at any time, in any place, with any problem, with the assurance that the ear of God is turned to all who are in fellowship with Him. As a mother has her ear attuned to the cry of her baby, so the Lord has His ear attuned to the cries of His people. Abraham Lincoln used to say, “ *when I don't know why way to go I go to my knees.* ” (a) (b)

(c) THE LORD IS FIGHTING FOR US:

“ *But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil,* ” (3:12) The face of the Lord refers to judgment. (Gen 19:13 Lam 4:16) Now remember Peter is writing to saints who are being criticized, pressurized, ostracized, and he just reminding them that God is for them. Do you need that reminder this ? Like them have you been

facing opposition, hardship, trials ? Will you get your eyes on the Lord ? The Lord who is with you, the Lord is over you, and the Lord who is for you.

Growing Up. Are you ? Have you stood in an airport terminal and looked out of the window into the cockpit of the airplane parked at the gate ? *Do you know what the pilot is doing ?* He sitting there with a clipboard checking off all the instruments and systems. You watch him the next time you are about to board a plane. He does not take anything for granted that why he returns to that list time and time and time again. We must not take our Christian maturity for granted either. Here the Lord has given us a checklist. We have summarized like this. (1) (2) (3) In light of this checklist where do you in stand ? **Are you still in spiritual babyhood, or are you pressing on toward maturity ?**