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Progressing or Hindering

Introduction

I find that as I grow older and the reality of life's shortness grows ever more evident, there is a contemplative considering of the things that are past and that which might have been. I think of when I was a teenager, early teenage years, I went to learn the piano. For two years I studied it, practiced hours on scales and difficult fingering, and in that short time I went from knowing nothing to getting ready to do my 7th grade exam in the Royal Conservatory of London. Then I quit. I just decided to quit music, stopped my practicing and now I wonder, "Had I continued what could I have done?" In a nutshell, something came into my life and my progress was hindered.

When Paul was writing to the Galatian saints he saw that which they could have been but somewhere along the line they were hindered (Gal. 5:7). If it was only in music I got hindered, how often in my spiritual life have I been hindered; sometimes, momentarily, sometimes for longer durations, sometimes I did not notice it, sometimes I did. The fact is, those "hindered" times can never be relived.

When I sit with close associates and the communications get on to such a topic, I soon discover that we are all the same. As we review the years we all have regrets concerning things which hindered our spiritual development. Sadly, as such matters are considered, we can think of those who once ran well, excellent in evangelism, Bible teaching, care for the saints, but something came into their life and in time it completely hindered them for further spiritual usefulness. What are some of the hinderances the saints can be hindered with?

The Blessing of Conversion

Conversion is a blessing beyond words, a blessing that had come among the Galatians. They had been released from the controlling power of the law and heathen religiosity and knew the blessing of being saved by grace and more. In Galatians the individual is not only justified, they are freed from the law with its curse (Gal 3:13) the law with its bondage (Gal. 4:21-31); the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2); but like Demas who loved this present age, they went back, they were "hindered". This hindering is spoken of as "turned back" (Acts 7:39); "backsliding" (Prov. 14:14); "lukewarm" (Rev. 3:16); and "left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4).

Some of The Hinderings of Life

1) Hindered by the inconsistency of other believers

- a) Because we are human, it is so very easy for us to blame others of that which we have done. Adam and Eve did it for Adam actually blamed God for his disobedience in saying, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat!!" (Gen. 3:12). Then the woman blamed the serpent, no one wanted to take personal responsibility. We look at other believers who have failed, perhaps someone put on a pedestal and then to your amazement it was discovered that the individual was not as you thought them to be. Disappointed, you just gave up. How utterly foolish to "lose ones own soul". That is the purpose God made and saved each individual because someone else failed. Our eyes were in the wrong place, looking at distorted humanity instead of responding to the words of Peter and looking at Christ and His example. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

2) Hindered by persecution

- a) As I write this I think of those believers in Muslim countries who are being beheaded, or going through severe tribulations and beginning to lose heart. The writer to the Hebrews told the saints to remember their past experiences (Heb. 10:32). How easy to give everything up, deny one was saved at all, shut the Bible and determine not to pray again. Let us not be surprised for if I understood correctly, the Prime Minister of Canada had declared that the greatest threat is not climate change, but

Bible believing Christians. Again the answer to discouragement and suffering is to consider that the Lord knew what it was to be threatened with stoning (Jn. 8:59); crowned with thorns (Jn. 19:1-3); mocked and became the song of the drunkard (Psa. 69:12); and crucified in the midst of guilty men (Jn. 19:18). Being associated with the Lord comes at a cost. For some saints it is a lot more costly than others. I think of William Tyndall who translated the Bible and was burned at the stake. What suffering he knew, or the many saints who in the days of the evil men had their bodies dipped in tar and hung throughout the day on poles and then set on fire at night. Several years ago I stood in one of the theaters where saints were cast to the lions. I stood in the very place they awaited their torturous death by mauling and savagery. How noble they were, and they could only endure this, and when the opportunity came to recant they refused. They were not hindered by persecution.

3) Hindered by a severe trial or sorrow

- a) When Israel was liberated from Egypt, their belief that God would bring them to the promised land was very quickly tested. Did they really believe God would do as He promised, that He had the ability to bring them across the “waste howling wilderness” (Deut. 32:10) to the land flowing with milk and honey? They were soon faced with humanly impossible obstacles to overcome, the Red Sea, or when they needed water which was a major need, not only for humanity but also the thousands of animals. It was not just a little water needed it was copious amounts daily. These tests were to see if they really believed or just a cold factual acknowledgment of the ideal? These were indeed severe trials, but they were part of God’s disciplining them, training them to trust God. It is wickedness to insinuate that God is either a liar or does not have the ability to do as He has promised. The Psalmist and writer to the Hebrews informs its readers repeatedly, they were characterized by unbelief (Psa. 78:22, 32; Heb. 3:18, 19; 4:6, 11).
- b) There is a need to understand what the word “discipline” means. It means, “training in obedience; correction for our improvement”. God allows both, all sorts of testings and trials and brings us into circumstances to test our faith. Furthermore, the tests and trials are to “force” us to be completely dependent on Him (Psa. 55:22) in order that we may be refined (Mal. 3:3), and that our faith may be deepened (1 Pet. 1:7).
- c) Hindered by the attractiveness of the world as a result of neglecting fellowship with the Lord. How often we have heard the words of John repeated, “Love not the world neither the things that are in the world” (1 Jn. 2:15). Only once in my 60 years of being a Christian have I ever heard any teaching on why we ought not to love it and only possibly once how loving the world begins in the heart of a saint. When we first saw the individual who became our spouse we were not madly in love at the first glimpse. Normally we liked the look of the individual, then being attracted to them there was the getting to know them, and the liking changed to an affection, and then there was the realization that we loved that individual. Loving the world begins with it’s attraction. It may be it’s sports, it’s theater, it’s company, it’s socializing, it’s music. What it was is of no account. It started with that attraction, then there was the spending of more time with that particular interest, more speaking about it, more moving my days around so that I could be involved with it, and at a point, we loved the world. We needed it’s offering and the things of God were “boring”, Bible reading was a chore, praying was a string of dead phrases, an obligation we felt that had to be done.

4) Hindered by some willful act of disobedience

- a) When I was a young man I foolishly thought that when I am older I would not be beset with the sins of youth. Alas, how wrong I was. When the ancient prophet wrote concerning the sins of Israel he pointed out to them that before they left Egypt they were idolaters. When going through the wilderness they practiced idolatry, when they were brought into the land they were idolaters, and then when he wrote they were still idolaters, the same old sins as in unredeemed days. Surely they ought to be more spiritual but the flesh which lusts (*longs and will try everything to dominate the spirit*) never dies as long as we are in this body.

- b) We may have the best of intentions but they will never bring our sinful natures into submission. We can be as sincere as possible yet all the sincerity will not bring our sinful natures into subjection. Paul discovered this truth and wrote about it (Rom. 7:14-25).
- c) Sin must be drastically dealt with concerning a wrong friendship (Amos 3:3); an unequal yoke (2 Cor. 6:14); a secret sin (Josh. 7:18-23); some impurity (Isa. 52:11); an unforgiving spirit (Matt. 18:21-22); or an unfulfilled vow (Deut. 23:21).

The Hindering of God By Humanity (Psa. 106)

One of the most remarkable verses in the scriptures is, “Yea they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psa. 78:41). The word “limited” comes from a Hebrew word which means to curtail, restrict. It is an astounding statement informing us that fallen man, in determining to do his own will, can limit God. It is astounding, God being curtailed in the fulness of the blessing He desires to give. What led the children of Israel to be in such a situation where they limited God and prevented them from receiving the full blessing of God? Psalm 106 gives us in part the answer which we cannot develop at this time. However, we read the people understood not (Psa. 106:7); remembered not (Psa. 106:7); waited not (Psa. 106:13); believed not (Psa. 106:24); and harkened not (Psa. 106:25).

Conclusion

May the Lord help us until we are released from this body of sin not to hinder or limit His full use of our bodies, and be recipients of the fulness of His blessing.

. . . Rowan Jennings