

THE DANGER OF BEING UNFIT
Luke 9:62, 12:15, 14:35

INTRODUCTION:

For four months, one-third of a year, I've been trying to motivate us to desire spiritual fitness. We've looked at the advantages of being spiritually fit and we've looked at examples of spiritual fitness. I've taught you from the Word of God that it is possible: you CAN be spiritually fit. But today, I want to preach the other side of that message. There is a danger in being spiritually unfit. There are influences that will draw you away from spiritual fitness, that will erode your resolve and seduce your spirit. Beware of these. I derive them from Luke's gospel. Jesus told three different parables that speak to that which endangers our spiritual fitness.

I. Longing For That Which Is Behind Us (Luke 9:57-62)

In Luke 9, we meet a man who wanted to be a disciple of Jesus. This guy approached Jesus and affirmed his desire by saying, "I will follow you wherever you go." But Jesus must have sensed a shallowness in his commitment because he said to the man, "*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.*" We do not have any indication that this man followed through on his commitment to follow Jesus wherever he went. It would appear that he was distracted by that which was around him.

In the next few verses, we meet another man. Jesus took the initiative this time and specifically asked the man to follow him. The man replied, "*Lord, first let me go and bury my father.*" Jesus said to him, "*Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.*" As many commentators have noted, in all likelihood, this man's father was probably not even sick, much less dead. By Jewish custom, a son would stay with and care for his father until he passed away and then he was free to make his own choices and live his own life. This man said he would follow Jesus later...when he was free from the social obligations toward his father. Again, there is no indication that this man ever responded to Jesus' call. It would appear that he was distracted by that which was ahead of him.

In the following verses, we meet a third man: the one I want to spend some time with. This man, like the first, took the initiative and approached Jesus and volunteered to follow him. "*But first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.*" Now that seems like a reasonable request. But Jesus didn't think so. "*Jesus replied, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God.'*"

The man said a lot when he stipulated, "But first let me go back..." If the first man was distracted by that which was around him and the second

was distracted by that which was ahead of him, this one was distracted by that which was behind him. He revealed poor priorities when he said “*I will follow you, Lord; but first let me...*” Anyone who says he will be a disciple of Jesus; but first he wants to do something else, is in danger of never being spiritually fit. Clearly Jesus is not his first priority. “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me...” are not the words of one who will be spiritually fit for life.

“I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back...”

In Ecclesiastes 7:10, Solomon, with his wealth of wisdom, wrote:

¹⁰ *Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?”
For it is not wise to ask such questions.*

Someone has said that nostalgia isn’t what it used to be. Maybe not but it’s still pretty big. Retro radio and television shows are among the most popular. The music of our past is popular for every generation. My email inbox seems to fill up with trivia quizzes about the good old days. There is a lively market for antique furniture. Why, some people are even buying old tractors and restoring them. It may reflect what Solomon warned us against. “*Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’*”

Nostalgia is big. But nostalgia is an interesting word. It comes to us from the Greek language and it is a compound word made up of two terms: *nostos* means “home” and *algos* means “pain, grief or distress”. The two words were combined as a reference to soldiers who had a hard time on the battlefield because of homesickness; they were longing for that which was behind them.

Many a Christian soldier in the army of the Lord has deserted his Commander because he longed for that which was behind him. Maybe it was the friends with whom he used to run. Maybe it was the sin in which he used to indulge. I don’t know but I do know that nostalgia for the life before you became a Christian is not healthy.

Nostalgia for the Christian you used to be is not healthy, either. Not for Christians and not for Christian churches. People who speak fondly and proudly about all the things they used to do for the Lord are not in a healthy place. Churches that can reminisce better than they can plan are not fit for life. Any church whose memories are more exciting than her dreams does not have a very bright future.

“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service” – nor will he be fit for life. Longing for that which is behind us will render us unfit for life.

II. Loving That Which Is Around Us (Luke 12:13-21)

And loving that which is around us will render us unfit for life. In the twelfth chapter of Luke, the author tells us that a crowd of many thousands had gathered to hear Jesus. The crowd was so large that the people were trampling on one another. Jesus addressed the crowd with warnings, teachings and words of encouragement.

¹³ *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*

¹⁴ *Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"* ¹⁵ *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

¹⁶ *And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop."* ¹⁷ *He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'*

¹⁸ *"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'* ¹⁹ *And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."*

²⁰ *"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"*

²¹ *"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

"A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Those are words we need to hear. The ads on the television, on the radio and in the newspapers and magazines would lead us to believe otherwise. If you took them seriously, they would make you think that you really are only the sum of your possessions. But Jesus warned that we most certainly are not.

Most of you know that I wear contact lenses. I am afflicted with myopia: more commonly called nearsightedness. Without corrective lenses, I can see things that are very, very close to me but I can't see things that are away from me.

One of my favorite riddles is:

Q: What did the near-sighted porcupine say when it backed into a cactus?

A: Pardon me, honey!

That's pretty bad myopia!

A lot of people are spiritually near-sighted. All they seem to see is that which is around them: the material world. They focus so much on the things of earth that they cannot see the things that are of the Lord. One of

our choruses says, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus; Look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.”

If we love the things of the world, we will never be fit for life. Simon Peter put it very well in his second epistle...in chapter 1 verses 5 through 9.

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

The spiritually nearsighted person forgets that from which he has been cleansed. The spiritually nearsighted person can't see the value of virtues like goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. The spiritually nearsighted person will be ineffective and unproductive for the Lord. The spiritually nearsighted person will never be fit for life...because he loves that which is around him.

III. **Losing That Which Distinguishes Us (Luke 14:34-35).**

There is a danger of being spiritually unfit for life if we long for that which is behind us, if we love that which is around us and if we lose that which distinguishes us.

Turning over to the fourteenth chapter of Luke, verses 34 and 35, Luke records Jesus' words:

³⁴ “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

Salt that loses its saltiness is fit for neither the soil nor the manure pile. It is unfit for any use. You cannot flavor food with it because it has lost its distinctive savory flavor. But on the other hand, you can't add it to the compost pile because it won't nourish the soil. Salt that loses its distinctiveness is unfit.

And so are Christians that lose their distinctiveness.

Christians must not lose their distinctiveness as individuals. If our lifestyle, our labor, our language and our legacy are not distinct from the world, how will people know that we are disciples of Christ? Our walk must be characterized by moral purity. For anyone who would call himself after the name of Jesus, it is not a reason to say, “Everybody else is doing it.”

Everybody else is not a disciple of Jesus. But you are and your life must show it.

Christians must maintain their distinctiveness individually...and congregationally. People, I want you to listen to me very carefully and understand me very precisely: I am absolutely in favor or working with the other churches in our community. We must be loving, kind and cooperative with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are not a part of this church. But that being said, we must not, in the process, forfeit our doctrinal distinctiveness. I firmly believe our old slogan that we are not the only Christians; we are Christians only. I don't believe we have a lock on all the truth. But I also know that there are important doctrinal differences between us and the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), between us and the Baptist churches and between us and the Methodist church. We do not all believe the same things. If we did, there would be no reason to have four churches in town. I believe what we teach and I teach what we believe. If I did not believe what we teach, I'd have to join a different church that I believed was teaching the truth of God more accurately. I am absolutely in favor or working with the other churches in our community but I am unwilling, in the process, to pretend that there are no differences between us or that those differences don't matter. If we lose our doctrinal distinctiveness, we are not fit for the soil or the manure pile...we are not fit for anything.

And while I firmly believe we must maintain our moral purity as individuals and our doctrinal purity as a congregation, I am equally convinced that we must maintain our distinctiveness as a movement. Clay City Christian Church is part of an international fellowship of Christians that numbers over 1.25 million members in this country and over 2 million worldwide. This fellowship came into existence as a movement with two equal emphasizes.

The first was an emphasis on Christian unity. The pioneers of this movement did not want to be separated from other believers because of human creeds and denominational agencies. They simply wanted to be known as Christians so they could enjoy fellowship with anyone else who was a Christian.

The second emphasis of this movement was the truth of Scripture. If we were not going to expect adherence to any manmade creed, what would be the authority for doctrine in the church? They decided it would be the Bible only. They used to say that the Bible only makes Christians only. The Bible plus some manmade creed or doctrinal statement would make you a part of the different denominations but the Bible only would make you a Christian only.

Folk, we dare not lose the distinctive element of our fellowship, which is that we hold those two priorities in balance. As Dr. James North put it in his excellent history of our Restoration Movement: "Unity in Truth".

Individually, congregationally and as a fellowship, we dare not lose that which distinguishes us.

CONCLUSION:

Leonard Ravenhill tells about a group of tourists visiting a picturesque village who walked by an old man sitting beside a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked, "Were any great men born in this village?" The old man replied, "Nope, only babies."

Likewise, no spiritually fit people were born again through the ministry of this church...just spiritual babes who were aware of the perils but were determined to be fit for life anyway.

Do you really want to be fit for life? Really?!? Then be very wary of those things that will prevent your growth toward spiritual maturity.

INVITATION: #561 – *"I Would Be Like Jesus"*