

Sermon for Sunday, February 27, 1977, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
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"BORN--REBORN--THEN WHAT?" PART II
Philippians 3:7-16

Text: "...but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward
to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward
call of God in Christ Jesus." --Philippians 3:13b-14

Last Sunday I started out to preach a sermon about growing as a Christian. After a person receives Jesus as his personal saviour and is born again, what then? Is that the end of the whole business of being saved or is it just the beginning of a whole new life? Well, obviously, when we read the Bible about what kind of persons we ought to be, being born again is just the beginning of something--it is the beginning of a spiritual process whereby we grow from being babes in Christ to spiritual maturity. Just as we go through certain stages in physical development where we go from babyhood to childhood to youthhood to adulthood, so we should grow spiritually.

However, the question that faces us as Christians is this: are we truly growing in Christ? Am I more spiritually mature today than I was yesterday? Have I grown in Jesus in the past months? Have I moved out of my spiritual babyhood into a new stage of development? I'd like to put that question to you this morning: Where are you in your spiritual development? Many of us are like the man who fell off the train as it began to pull out of the station. Somebody asked him what happened and he replied, "Well, I was standing too close to where I got on." Many of us who fall away from Jesus or who do not have an effective spiritual life, fall into sin because we are standing too close to where we got on. We do not grow as Christians. How are you growing this morning?

Well, I would like to talk about that this morning. I would like to talk about some things we can do to help us grow. However, let me remind you of two things I said last Sunday which are prerequisites to spiritual growth. First, I said you have to have the Holy Spirit. When we try to be a Christian and to live a Christian life, the first thing we discover is that we can't do it. The Bible says to love my neighbor. I try, but I can't. I just don't have the spiritual power. The Bible tells me to be forgiving. I try, but I can't do it. I find myself full of hate and vengeance. The Bible tells me to be humble. And I try that, too. But the first little thing I accomplish, I find myself bursting with pride. Is that your experience? So right away I discover that I can't live the Christian life for the simple reason that I don't have the spiritual power. As it turns out, I'm not different from anybody else, however. As a matter of fact, those first disciples didn't have any spiritual power either--that is, until they got filled with the Holy Spirit. And that's exactly what Jesus had told them. He said, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." (Acts 1:8) When that spiritual power came into their lives, they went out to love the world to life! So the first prerequisite for living the Christian life is to have the Holy Spirit. God not only gives us forgiveness and salvation, he also gives us his presence, his Spirit, his power to work in our hearts and help us to become what he wants us to be.

Do you have that power this morning? Do you have the Holy Spirit in your life? You receive the Holy Spirit in the same way you receive Christ. You invite God to fill you with His Spirit. You ask him to take command of the control center of your life. You surrender your will to him. As we are thinking about the Holy Spirit in our hearts, there are two things we need to remember. First, God commands us to be filled. The Bible says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." (Eph. 5:18) So God's will for us is to be filled with the Spirit. The second thing we need to remember is this: God answers any

prayer we make when what we pray for is according to his will. The Bible says, "And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us... (and) we know that we have obtained the requests made of him." (I John 5:14,15)

So, it is as simple as that. God commands that we be filled and that is his will for you this morning. And if we ask anything that is in his will, the Bible says he will answer. To be filled with the Spirit is simply to ask God to fill you and by faith to believe that he answers you.

To grow as Christians means first that you must have the Holy Spirit. The second prerequisite for growing as a Christian means discipline. Most of us don't like that word discipline. We want things to come easily and perhaps even naturally for us. But that isn't how the Christian life comes. To be saved is easy. It means simply accepting Jesus and what he has done for us. But to begin to live out that salvation is not so easy. It comes hard. It is difficult. It means bringing some spiritual discipline into my life. Many of us have not grown in our spiritual lives simply because we have had no discipline. A musician cannot master the keyboard without discipline. A wife cannot master the housekeeping without discipline. A lawyer cannot master the legal codes without discipline. A doctor cannot master his science without discipline. As a matter of fact, no worthwhile achievement can be accomplished without discipline--and the same is true for the Christian life.

Let me share with you some areas where discipline must begin if we are to mature as Christians. Each of these areas demand a great deal more attention than I can give them this morning, but at least let me mention them for you. The first and perhaps most important area of discipline may surprise you. But unless you have some discipline at this point in your life, I question how sincere the other areas are. The first area of spiritual discipline is stewardship. Does that surprise you? You see, two of the most important things I have are my possessions and my time. If I am not exercising discipline in those areas, I am by-passing the things dearest to me. So stewardship involves my possessions. Do you remember how St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the Macedonian Christians? He wrote, "for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints..." (II Cor. 8:2-4). To grow as a Christian demands discipline in my financial life whereby God participates in what I have. Without discipline in that part of your life, you will not grow very much. But stewardship also involves how I use my time. Now, I am not thinking about spending time doing so-called church work (although that has its place, too). I am talking about mental energy. What do you think about? Is it your job or your house, your family or your friends, a movie or television program, what you will eat or wear or where you will go and with whom you will go? But how much of our mental energy is spent for the Lord and the things of God? St. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." And then he adds, "...and the God of peace will be with you." (Phil. 4:8,9) Yes, discipline involves first of all stewardship--stewardship of your possessions and stewardship of your time, you mental energy.

Secondly, discipline involves prayer. Now, when I say the word "prayer" most of us have an automatic image in our minds. We think of bowing in church while the preacher prays. Or we think of kneeling by our beds at night to pray. Or we think of setting aside a certain time every day that we will use to pray. Well, those times of prayer

are important, but I think discipline in prayer means more than that. If prayer is communion with God or conversation with God, then prayer means staying in touch. Therefore real prayer means constant communication. It means being in conversation with God when I'm driving my car, or waiting for an elevator, or waiting for someone to answer the phone, or talking to God when you are cooking dinner, or whatever you might be doing that does not fully occupy your mind or time. When my secretary buzzes me on the intercom to tell me I have a call on line two, as I reach to push the button, I'm praying, "Lord, make me sensitive to this person," When I'm checking my daily schedule, I pray for the people I'll be coming in contact with. So, discipline in prayer means developing an attitude of communication. God has an open mike, and as Phillips translates James 5:16, "Tremendous power is made available through a good man's earnest prayer."

Thirdly, discipline involves Bible study. St. Paul wrote the Colossians: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly..." (Col. 3:16) Too many of us are biblically illiterate today. Someone has called the Bible the manufacturer's handbook and surely we cannot run the product well without that handbook. One of the most poignant scenes in the New Testament is described in the 20th chapter of Acts. Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and he realizes that his life is in danger. He may never see again those beloved friends and Christians among whom he has labored so long and hard to bring to Jesus. On his way to Jerusalem he stops at the little seaport town of Miletus and sends for the elders in the church at Ephesus. They come to him and when he leaves the Bible tells us that they prayed together and they wept and embraced Paul and kissed him (Acts 20:37) and the Bible says, "sorrowing...that they should see his face no more." But that day Paul left them with some instructions about the Bible. He said as his last instruction to them, "And now I commend you to ...the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give to you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (Acts 20:32) Yes, discipline involves getting into the word of God.

Fourthly, discipline involves fellowship. It is hard to be a Christian alone. We need each other. Jesus makes us an unequivocal promise. He says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Yes, as Christians gather together, something special happens. The power of the presence of God is there in a special way. As a matter of fact, at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers, we read these words, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place." (Acts 2:1) When God's people gather together great things happen. In Acts (2:43-47) we are told how as the Christians came together, the Lord added to their numbers day by day.

So discipline involves stewardship, it involves prayer, it involves Bible study, it involves fellowship. But there is one finally thing that above all discipline involves. I am going to call it the discipline of the planted feet. It is having staying power. Too many of us today are looking for new spiritual thrills, new gimmicks. The so-called eastern religions and the things like the Children of God, or the religion imported from Korea by the man named Moon have proliferated because Christians are unstable in their commitments, looking for new thrills, new excitements, new short-cuts to spiritual maturity. To have discipline in your spiritual life means to abide in Jesus. Do you remember how he put it? He said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me...He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit." (John 15:4,5) So many Christians run off after the newest fad in religion or theology. But to grow and mature as a Christian means to make your commitments to Jesus and abide in them, to plant your feet. Like Luther of old, we grow in maturity when--whatever the threat--we say, "Here I stand. I can do no other."

Let me tell you the story of a Scottish preacher named Henry Lyte. After he graduated from school he was jostled from one little church to another until finally he went to a little village in England called Brixham. It wasn't much of a parish, but he felt God had put him there. So he planted his feet, he began to "abide" in Jesus in the work God gave him. He gave his life fully and without reservation to ministering to the simple fisher-folk and the soldiers from the neighboring garrison. But at last his health broke and the doctor told him that if he wished to live he would have to go to a warmer and sunnier climate. One Sunday morning with great difficulty he preached his farewell sermon to the people for whom he had poured out his life. That afternoon, sitting in his study for the last time, he wrote the words to a beautiful poem. The next morning he started for Italy, but he never completed the journey. By the time he had reached Nice, France, his strength was gone. There on November 20, 1847, he died. The poem he wrote that day has meant a great deal to Christians ever since. Many repeat it at night as they go to sleep. Edith Cavell sang it before she was martyred in Belgium in 1915. It goes like this:

Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;
 The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide:
 When other helpers fail, and comforts flee;
 Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Henry Lyte knew what it was to be filled with the Spirit and he knew what it was to discipline his spiritual life so that he could grow in the Lord. And there at the last he could plant his feet, he could cry out at the end,

Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes;
 Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;
 Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
 In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Discipline involves fellowship. It is hard to be a Christian alone. We read each other. Jesus makes us an unconditional promise. He says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Yes, as Christians gather together, something special happens. The power of the presence of God is there in a special way. As a matter of fact, at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers, we read these words, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place." (Acts 2:1) When God's people gather together great things happen. In Acts (2:42-47) we are told how as the Christians came together, the Lord added to their number day by day.

So discipline involves stewardship, it involves prayer, it involves Bible study, it involves fellowship. But there is one thing that unites all disciplines. I am going to call it the discipline of the planned rest. It is having staying power. Too many of us today are looking for new spiritual thrills, new gimmicks. The so-called eastern religions and the things like the Children of God or the religion imported from Korea by the man named Moon have proliferated because Christians are unstable in their commitments, looking for new thrills, new excitement, new short-cuts to spiritual maturity. To have discipline in your spiritual life means to abide in Jesus. Do you remember how he put it? He said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me... He who abides in me, and I in him, he is that bears much fruit." (John 15:4-5) So many Christians run off after the newest fad in religion or theology. But to grow and mature as a Christian means to make your commitments to Jesus and abide in them, to plant your feet, like Luther of old, we grow in maturity when- whatever the threat- we say, "Here I stand, I can do no other."